

# The Worshipers' God Seeks

## *True Worship:*

John 4:21-24

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*I made my bed! I know I broke curfew. I know I didn't call and I came in an hour and a half late. I know I broke the rules, but I'm trying. I know I'm only 17 and you smelled alcohol on my breath and found a beer can in the car, but I made my bed. That must count for something. You know I don't like to make my bed. Look, I'll even clean my room if that is so important.*

Would such reasoning satisfy you? Would it reassure you that your daughter or son is on the path to a full and wonderful life? Aren't those really words of rejection? Don't they really say: "I want to appease your anger, but I don't really believe you know what is best for me?" I'm not sure the teen sees those words as rejection, but we can see through the words.

Is it possible that we act that way with God? Could God see through some of our words? Could some of our worship not be worship? Jesus said:

*A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.*  
(John 4:23-24, NIV)

Jesus said that God is actually looking for certain kind of worshipers. Why?

Two weeks ago, Rick Phillips, opened this series on *True Worship*, asking the question: "Does God need worship?" Rick read Scripture telling us that God needs nothing. God did not make you and me out of need. We were made out of love. We were made from his giving nature. God did not make us because he needs anything, let alone worship. Why then does he search for a certain kind of worshipers?

Last Sunday, Randy Phillips, shared God's challenge in the transfiguration of Jesus. You remember the Transfiguration. During a prayer time on a mountain, Jesus became radiant with

light, and Moses and Elijah appeared. Excited, the disciples wanted to prolong the experience. However, a cloud encompassed them all, and God spoke: ***“This is my beloved Son. Listen to him!”*** Why did God allow the disciples to experience this moment with Jesus? God wanted the disciples to know his love for Jesus, and he wanted them to listen to Jesus. Why? God sent Jesus to them in love... in love of Jesus and in love of them. If the disciples listened, they would welcome the love of God in all its power to change them and bring them life. If they didn't listen, they would miss the love of God and the life for which they were created.

The 17-year-old, who broke curfew and consumed alcohol, was missing the love of her parents. It wasn't that they didn't love her. It was that she was so consumed with filling holes in her life – perhaps seeking acceptance from a group of friends, or maybe vengeance over a perceived violation of trust by God or her parents – that she rejected the wisdom and love of her parents. In rejecting their word, she dishonored and defamed them. Her actions stated that either her parents did not care that she kept late hours, broke the law and drank, or that her parents' judgment is not worthy of trust. Either way, she elevated her judgment at her parents' expense. She felt that she knew best how to fulfill her needs, and her parents did not.

Like that 17-year old, we have needs. We act to fulfill them. We may hunger for acceptance, be motivated by anger or financial need; but we all face the choices of that 17-year old. How do we treat the word of our heavenly Father when responding to our needs? Do we dishonor and defame God? Does our behavior and attitude suggest that we know better how to meet our needs and that God's word and wisdom gets in the way? What's your pocketbook say, what's your calendar say, what's your daily routine say?

God made us in love, and he is looking for a certain kind of worshipers because they'll actually receive his love. They will receive his love, and not defame and dishonor him in their

worship. Others won't be prevented from coming to him because of their actions. What kind of worshipers is he looking for?

Jesus said that God is searching for people that will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Jesus said that God is a spirit and therefore, he must be worshiped in spirit.

Now, I might not be mechanical; but I am a concrete-type of guy. Spiritual talk is kind of fuzzy and hazy to me. When I went to college, I avoided the philosophy and religion courses and took all the hard sciences. I had to catch up on those in theological school. Give me something material to work with or observe. So when Jesus says, "we must worship God in spirit," I kind of glaze over. It has taken me years to grasp what is being said.

When Jesus came to earth, he encountered a lot of devout worshipers who were sincere. The vast majority of devout worshipers rejected him. They were sincere in their devotion to God, yet they rejected Jesus and by rejecting Jesus they rejected God. You've read this in the gospels, haven't you? Read the gospel of John. You'll see the devout reject Jesus, and you'll read Jesus saying that they are not just rejecting him, they are rejecting God.

These devout worshipers were sincere; yet they rejected God. How come? Because God is a Spirit moving among them and they were worshiping an idea of God framed in the past! They worshiped an icon framed in history. They paid tribute the God of the past. They observed rules and rituals that focused on the past, but ignored the present. They didn't see how God was coming to them right then and there. They didn't recognize how God was speaking to them personally in John the Baptist, or how he now came in the Anointed One, the Son of Man, Jesus. Later many would miss how God was visiting them in the Apostles or in the Christian believers that lived next door.

God is a Spirit who is moving among us today. If we are to worship him in spirit, we must acknowledge his presence among us. We must welcome his visitation today.

For years, I sat through worship services with no sense of God's presence. My posture was head cocked to the side, chin on hand and eyes half closed. I did not know God was visiting us. I did not receive the love he had for me. I defamed him with my worship. I said with my actions, "He doesn't come when we gather to honor him."

God is looking for people who will move beyond history and welcome him today. He is looking for people who will worship him in spirit. He is also looking for people who will worship him in truth.

I know some translations of our text talk of sincere worshipers, but that is not the point. People sincerely worship all kinds of things. Jesus used the words truth in contrast to a Samaritan woman's ignorance about God. He said:

***You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.*** (John 4:22, NIV)

Jesus states that God is real, and that God has acted in history. There are many false gods. Worship them and your sins will destroy you... and those you love. God is looking for people who will embrace the truth and worship him now... and now be remade in his love.

If the gospel of Christ is not true, then we are destroying this world with illusions and delusions. But if the gospel is true, then we must welcome the work of God's Spirit among us. We must welcome his visitation today, and not confine it to history. For his love and the power of his love is to be experienced now.

Are you caught up in the forms or traditions of worship? Are you appeasing your conscience or comforting yourself with your practice of worship? Are you paying tribute to a historical icon? God's looking for people ready to welcome his current visitation? Is that you?