Authentic Worship

John 4:23-24 But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. 24 God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

False Worship

- Jesus, in his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well provides us with a key insight into worship.
- He makes a rather interesting statement about true worshippers that stirs the curiosity.
- If there are true worshippers then that must mean, by implication, that there are also false worshippers.
- Which gives rise to an important question:
  - How can worship be false?
- Follow with me for a minute.
  - Worship would seem to indicate activity.
  - We aren’t talking about apathetic folks that simply refuse to acknowledge God.
  - Rather, the implication is that there are folks who actively participate in acts of worship that are false!
  - How can that which appears to glorify God, that which appears to lift him up, that which appears to declare his majesty, be be anything less than worship?
  - If an individual takes the time to go through the motions of glorifying God how could the end result be anything less than glorifying God?
  - If you will allow me a moment tonight I believe I have some insight into this conundrum...

Moral Hypocrisy

- I’ve been pretty immersed for the last month or so in an effort to get the literary groundwork laid for my Master’s Thesis.
- Without going into too much detail, my thesis deals with an area of hypocrisy in the lives of people who profess to be highly religious.
- In the course of studying this phenomenon I came across a psychological state that applies to the current discussion.
- It is something that social scientists call Moral Hypocrisy.
- Moral Hypocrisy is the desire to appear moral to oneself and others without incurring the cost of actually being moral.
- It is morality that is purely external, that exists only for public consumption.
- It is a charade, it is only the appearance of morality that conceals an intentionally immoral heart.
- In other words, it is a form of morality that appears to be moral on the outside but is not really concerned at all with being moral on the inside.
• It is the morality of a self-centered individual that is concerned with keeping up the right appearances at the least possible cost to them.
• This is important because moral hypocrisy gives rise to a paradox that is best described as insincere morality.
• Consider this, there are times and places where an individual will actually act moral or will do moral things, not because they genuinely desire to be moral but, rather, because moral action is the least costly way to appear moral.
• To put it as plainly as I can, moral actions can sometimes be the result of moral hypocrisy.
• Sometimes an individual will do the “right thing” for purely selfish reasons, motivated by a desire to maintain the best possible presentation of self, they will act in a moral manner even though their heart is not in it.
• Now, that’s the extent of your social psychology lesson for the night, but let me make the application to insincere worship.

Insincere Worship
• There is such a thing as worship that seems to do all the right things, go though all the right motions, and say all the right words but that flows from a self-centered heart.
• It is externally oriented worship rather than internally oriented worship.
• It doesn’t flow from a heart that desires to glorify God, it doesn’t flow from a relationship with God, it isn’t the product of a desire to praise God.
• Rather, it is externally oriented; it is more interested in appearing to praise God and seeming to honor God without actually incurring the cost of accountability to God.
• It is self-oriented, selfish worship that is more focused on the worshiper than on the one being worshipped!
• Rather than the “deep crying unto deep” that the Psalmist sings about, it is a very shallow sense of carnality that sees worship as a means to an ends!
• Sometimes it is socially desirable to be perceived as a true worshipper, sometimes it is intended to simply soothe the conscience, sometimes it arises as the least costly way to satisfy an inner urge for a deeper meaning to life, but in every instance it is a self-centered pursuit.

Cain
• Consider Cain, he presents us with the first of many examples in the bible regarding this insincere worship.
• What was wrong with Cain’s offering?
• It wasn’t the offering that God required.
• Sin sacrifice requires the shedding of blood.
• The scripture tells us that Able acted in faith which leads us to believe that, since faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God that both Cain and Able had received instructions that originated with the word of God regarding the acceptable nature of sacrifice.
• However, when the time came to worship God, Cain chose to bring the fruits of his labor as a gardener instead of a sacrificial lamb.
• What would compel him to bring a sacrifice other than what God had required?
• Was it outright rebellion?
• Did he just decide that he didn’t care what God wanted He would do things his own way?
• I don’t think so, the way the scripture reads you are left with the impression that Cain had deceived himself into thinking that God would accept his offering.
• When God didn’t, the scripture says that his countenance fell.
• Cain was a tiller of the ground and Abel was a keeper of sheep.
• Cain’s offering was about self-affirmation; it was a self-centered attempt to get God’s approval on his chosen vocation.
• He convinced himself that since the product of Abel’s vocations was the lamb and since God accepted that then God would surely accept the product of his vocation as well.
• When he laid the fruit of the ground on that alter, what he was seeking was not to honor God but rather for God to honor him!
• This was the error of Cain: his worship was self-centered!
• It wasn’t about a spiritual motivation to glorify God; it was about seeking God’s approval on his carnal vocation!
• Authentic worship is God-centered, not self-centered.
• Cain’s worship was firmly centered on himself, on the external aspects of his carnal life.
• Jude tells the real tragedy of that story in his eleventh verse where he says that there are many today who “have gone the way of Cain!”
• There are many whose worship is no more authentic than Cain’s was, many who are oriented on what they can gain, what they are getting out of it, what it means to them – instead of what it means to God!

Isaiah
• The prophet Isaiah, in the first chapter of his book presents us with another example of false worship.
• He says in Isaiah 1:11: To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me?
• Reading from the ESV for clarity God says rather frankly:
  o 11 I have had enough of (your) burnt offerings...
  o 11 I do not delight in the blood of (your) bulls or lambs...
  o 13 Bring me no more vain offerings...
  o 14 Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates
  o 14 They have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them.
• The ordinances of worship that god lists in these and other verses in the first chapter of Isaiah are all required under the Hebrew law.
• All of them are ritualistic ceremonies of worship and the Israelites that he addressed were actively involved in the only kind of worship that they ever knew or understood.
• The ceremony and the sacrifice was the very act of worship.
• How could you mess that up?
• How could it come to be that God would come to hate your offerings, that he would find your worship to be a burden to him that he was tired of bearing?
• I mean, think about it for a moment, they WERE worshipping.
• As a matter of fact, the text leads us to believe that their acts of worship were extravagant, going above and beyond the necessary.
• For all intents and purposes they appeared to be extraordinarily devout in their worship.
• But God was fed up with their worship!
• As a matter of fact, in verse 13 h called it vain worship!
• The word means hollow, empty, false, deceitful or hypocritical.
• The problem wasn’t the rituals, the ceremonies, or the sacrifices – the problem was the manner in which they were offered.
• The offerings, all of their extravagant worship, were hollow, empty and meaningless!
• Isaiah explains why in verse 15: Their hands were full of blood, they had sin in their lives!
• The problem wasn’t the form of their worship the problem was that their worship was their pitiful attempt to cover up a sinful heart!
• Their worship was all about them.
• The more they sinned, the further from God they drifted, the more extravagant their worship became!
• But it wasn’t about God, it wasn’t about glorifying him, it was about them.
• It was an effort to camouflage their sinful heart!
• It was an effort to appear to worship God in their actions, while in truth, their hearts were far from him!

Outward Religion
• Outward religion without inward devotion is an offense to God!
• It doesn’t matter how extravagant you are in your outward display of Christian character if your heart is far from God!
• There are a lot of folks in our world today that are living just like Cain, just like the Israelites of Isaiah’s day, their hearts are far from God but they conceal a backslidden heart in the trappings of worship!
• It is the height of human arrogance to believe that God will somehow be content with an outward display of worship when the inner man is consumed with selfishness and self-centered motivations.
• It’s as if we convince ourselves, somehow, that God cannot see the true condition of our hearts!
• Can I let you in on a simple truth about worship?

Authentic Worship
• If god isn't in the center of it, if it isn't all about him, then it is despicable to God.
• God is not a man that he might be appeased by your actions!
• He is God. He is Holy. He is Righteous. And He will not share your heart with sin.
• Make no mistake about it, the essential principle of sin is selfishness.
• Sin is self-centered, sin exalts self above the glory of God.
• Authentic worship is God centered!
• When your worship centers on yourself instead of God, when you worship to cover up a sin filled heart, you make the sacred secular and empty the holy things of their very holiness!
• True worship grows out of a heart of love, gratitude and faith.
• The act of worship divorced from genuine love for God, or gratitude to God, or faith in God is hollow, empty and vain!
• Even Old Testament worship was empty and hollow when it did not flow from a heart that desired to know God!
• Consider Hosea 6:6 where God said that he desired mercy over sacrifice and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.
• Or consider the words of Jesus who said the Pharisees in Mark 7:6 that they honored him with their lips but their heart were far from him.
• Or how about Matthew 23:27 when Jesus got real frank with the Pharisees and called them hypocrites, declaring that they were like whitened sepulchers that appeared beautiful on the outside but were full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness on the inside!
• Their worship was purely external.
• It was all about appearing to be holy on the outside as a means of concealing the utter filth that was hidden on the inside.
• Their worship was self-centered!
• It was not an act of heart-felt devotion to God but rather it was the act of a sin-sick soul that desired to appear to be godly!
• That's what false, insincere worship is, it is a self-centered attempt to conceal the internal condition of the heart with external acts of worship.

Palm Sunday
• Today is Palm Sunday.
• On this day, several thousand years ago, the crowds came pouring out of Jerusalem and Bethany to worship Jesus as he entered the city of Jerusalem for the last time.
• Have you ever wondered how that crowd could so quickly move from cries of “Hosanna” to shouts of “Crucify Him”?
• In the short span of just a few days the same folks who would triumphantly wave palm branches and toss their coats on the ground before Jesus would rise in anger and pass a death sentence on him.
• I believe that the answer lies in the nature of their worship.
• According to Mark 11:9 they cried “Hosanna; blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

• Hosanna was an interesting choice as a word of worship.

• According to the Expositor’s Bible Commentary the word Hosanna means “Save, Now!”

• The Pulpit Commentary says the word Hosanna means, “Oh, save!”

• Both sources agree that it originated as the cry of captives clamoring for rescue.

• It was not much different than a distress call.

• Save us, it implored, with an emphasis on timeliness: Save us, NOW!

• The crowd that rushed to the streets on that day to worship Jesus had no understanding at all of who he really was or what he was getting ready to do.

• There was a messianic fever in the air, the word was out that Jesus was the Messiah and the reason they flocked to him is because they expected him to establish an earthly kingdom!

• The Jews were an oppressed people, who were struggling under the heavy hand of Roman rule and for years they had clung to the hope that the messiah was coming who would surely set them free.

• Make no mistake about it, when they lined the street that day and cried at the top of their lungs, “Hosanna” or “Save us”, the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven was the last thing on their mind.

• They believed that they were about to witness the rebirth of the kingdom of David!

• They believed that the Messiah was about to re-establish the kingdom of Israel to all of her former glory!

• This is why the scholars of that day never understood Jesus, because he wasn’t what they expected.

• They had misconstrued the prophecies of old, their focus was on earthly, carnal, things rather than on heavenly things.

• When they read that the Messiah would set them free, they never grasped the fact that the freedom that he was bringing was much deeper and much more lasting than the earthly freedom that they had imagined.

• According to the Expositor’s Bible Commentary, when they lined the street that day, the crowd proclaimed the kingdom, not the king!

• The Pulpit Commentary says that verse 10 should read: “Blessed be the kingdom that cometh, the kingdom of our father David, Hosanna in the highest!”

• The worship that echoed through the streets of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was focused on the coming of a carnal kingdom rather than a spiritual one.

• The jubilation that gripped the crowd on Sunday would fade so quickly just a few days later when Pilate presented their humble Messiah to them broken, beaten and bloodied because their hope for an immediate liberation from Rome was destroyed!
• They worshipped him not for who he was but for what they thought he was going to do for them!
• They cried for deliverance but never realized the kind of deliverance that he was about to accomplish.
• They wanted to be free from Rome, so they exalted Him as King as long as they thought that he would deliver them from Rome.
• But when they were faced with the realization that he would never deliver on their misplaced hopes and aspirations they quickly turned their back on him.
• With an animosity that would rival the affection that they had displayed only a few days earlier they cried crucify him, because their worship had been centered on what they thought they were about to gain!
• It was self-centered!

Authentic Worship
• Authentic worship doesn’t flow from external circumstances, it isn’t based on a self-centered view, it isn’t about us, its all about Him!
• Compare the Jews that so quickly changed their minds to the heart of Job who cried in Job 13:15
  o Though he slay me, yet will I trust Him!
• He goes on to say in verse 16:
  o He also shall be my salvation...
• The salvation that the Jews sought on Palm Sunday and the salvation that Job sought are distinctly different!
• The Jews sought an earthly kingdom and a physical deliverance
• Job sought a spiritual deliverance that was not anchored at all in physical things!
• As he lost everything, Job said: I will trust him and he will save me!
• Though he slay me, come what may, whatever happens to me, whether I ever see earthly deliverance or not, I will trust in God!
• I will worship him, I will put my faith in him, I will lift up His name for he is good!
• Authentic worship doesn’t rise from carnal circumstances.
• Its not grounded in what is happening in your life.
• If trouble and tragedy have the capacity to stifle your worship then there is something wrong!
• If hard times and lonely valleys can rob you of your praise, it’s an indicator of a deeper spiritual problem.
• If the dark clouds and troubled seas can silence your worship then you’ve got to ask yourself what you are really worshiping for.
• Authentic worship is about WHO he is not WHAT he might do for you!
• Authentic worship is Paul and Silas in a Philippian Jail singing praises in the midnight hour!

Spirit and Truth
• Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that true worshippers will worship the father in spirit and in truth.
• That statement gives us two key characteristics of authentic worship: It is done in spirit and in truth.
• The first phrase, in spirit, speaks of the spirit of man not the spirit of God.
• This not talking about the Holy Ghost or the impartation of God’s Spirit into our lives, it is talking about the part of man that most closely bears the image of God, which is his spirit.
• Jesus follows up in the next verse by delineating that God is a spirit.
• What he is saying is that true worship is not a carnal endeavor, instead, it is a spiritual event.
• The spirit of man, that part of man that God breathed into him, enters into communion with God!
• Authentic worship is born in the heart, it flows from an internal desire for God.
• It is the real essence of deep crying out to deep as the spirit of man communicates on a deeply spiritual level with the spirit of God!
• That’s what true worship is.
• True worship was not found in the rituals and ceremonies of the Old Testament, it was found in the deep communion of a heart with God as the rituals were carried out!
• True worship is not found in the act of singing, clapping, dancing or shouting, it is found in the communion of the spirit of the worshipper with the spirit of God in the act of worship!
• This why Hosea said that the knowledge of God was preferred over burnt offerings, not because God didn’t honor burnt offerings but because it wasn’t ever about the ordinance of sacrifice – it was always about the relationship between God and man!
• Old Testament worshippers didn’t and couldn’t commune with God the way New Testament worshippers can but the Old Testament is replete with evidence that the spirit of worship was far more important than the act of worship – even then!
• Something special happens when the human soul enters into intimate communion with God!
• That’s what Authentic Worship is!
• The second description of true worship was that it was done in truth.
• It was an expression of genuine, true, heartfelt desire that arises from a true desire to know God.
• There is no deceit in it.
• There is no self-deception in it.
• Its not just a charade.
• It’s a worship that flows from the wellspring of life as well as from the lips!
• From the very essence of his being, the true worshipper worships God in spirit and in truth!
Close

- The true worshippers were not revealed on Palm Sunday.
- The mob that thronged the streets that day was composed of fair weather worshippers who had often proven that they were in it for the bread, for the physical blessings, for the hope of carnal liberty.
- The true worshippers were revealed 8 weeks later on the Day of Pentecost when the faithful few were gathered together in an upper room worshiping God when it was no longer the popular thing to do!
- On that day, as they surrendered their hearts and lives to authentic worship, their came a sound like a rushing mighty wind and tongues of fire appeared on each and every one of them and they were baptized with the gift of the Holy Ghost!
- In that moment the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman took on a whole new meaning as authentic, spiritual, true worship was born!
- It is one of the defining characteristics of the book of acts church – they worshipped God!
- In everything they gave him praise!
- In every circumstance they rejoiced in Him!
- In every situation they surrendered their lives to his direction and guidance as a life of worship was lived out for the world to behold!
- If we plan to be an authentic, book of acts, church then we better learn what it means to be a true worshipper!
- Authentic worship I spiritual worship, not carnal!
- Authentic worship flows from a relationship with God, from the knowledge of God!
- Authentic worship...

The gift, without the giver, is empty!