

The Revelation of Worship in Spirit (John 4:20-24; Gen 22:1-19; Rom 12:1-2)



1. The Rival Claims of Jerusalem and Samaria - John 4:20-24

Jesus raised this controversy to a whole new level. The solution to the deep inner thirst and the unresolved sadness in the Samaritan woman had to do with the issue of worship! The institution of the animal sacrifice for worship was about to be phased out.

- a. *'But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him' (John 4:23).*

In 40 years, the Jerusalem temple would be destroyed. Here Jesus transferred the requirement of worship from 'physical location' to 'spiritual condition'. This would be true for both Jews and Gentiles all over the world. This internal spiritual condition was: 'in Spirit' and 'truth.'

- b. This is a staggering truth: *'God the Father actually seeks the worshippers of this kind – true worshippers.'* Heaven is saturated with the sound of worship, and yet God is seeking true worshipers on earth among mankind!
- c. I believe what the church needs most in this hour is true worship. We need a fresh vision of God, high and lifted up, and of the beauty of His holiness. The western church's spiritual decline is primarily due to the lack of direct encounter with the holy God. God's holiness is revealed in worship in spirit and truth. The OT prophets and the NT apostles were devastated when they had the revelation of the holiness of God. (C.f. Is 6:3-5; Jer 23:9; Rev 1:17)

2. The First Occurrence of 'Worship' in OT – Abraham in Gen 22:1-19

The word 'WORSHIP' first occurs even before the animal sacrifice was introduced in the OT. Abraham was 100+ of age. Isaac's age may be between that of a teenager to around 30.

- a. *'God tested Abraham' (Gen 22:1) - His last challenge to Abraham, now an old man of God. 'Take your son, your only son (not Ishmael), Isaac, whom you love and offer him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will show you.'* (Gen 22:2)

What a test! What did Isaac mean to Abraham? Isaac means 'laughter.' He was Abraham's joy and sunshine, Abraham's everything! This was not an unjust claim from God. It was a just demand within their covenantal relationship. Covenant means to lay down one's life for the good of the other. *'...behold there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed through those pieces [cut animals].'* (Gen 15:17)

- b. Abraham rose early in the morning to obey God immediately (v3). It took three days' journey to Mt Moriah. Abraham had three days to turn back. But he did not. When Abraham arrived at the mountain and was preparing to ascend the hill to offer Isaac, Abraham said to his servants, *'Stay here with the donkey.'* (v5) He needed to be alone with his son, Isaac, for their last walk together as father and son. It was a moment too sacred and too intimate for anyone else.

As they walked up together nearing the place of sacrifice, suddenly Isaac asked, *'My father.'* Abraham replied, *'Here I am my son.'* *'Look fire and the woods, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?'* *'My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.'*

Abraham had laid the wood on Isaac, and they walked up the mountain. What was Abraham thinking? Can you hear Abraham's heartbreaking? But Abraham was not turning back. This ascent to the hill of Moriah in obedience to the Lord's voice – this is what Abraham called 'worship' (22:5).

What was worship to Abraham? It is giving ourselves totally to God without any reservation. It is giving God the first place over all other affections of our hearts.

- c. The angel of the Lord stopped the sacrifice on Mt Moriah (22:9-11). But the worship of God from Abraham's heart was received. The Lord spoke to Abraham, *'for now I know that you fear God'* – this is the first time God mentions 'the holy fear of God'. This holy fear is still required in the NT worshippers. *'Let us have grace, by which we may serve (worship) God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.'* (Heb 12:28)

The revelation of YHWH Jireh is given here – ‘The LORD will provide.’ ‘In the mount of the LORD, it shall be provided.’ Moriah means ‘The LORD is my teacher.’ This is the same location known as the Calvary hill or Golgotha, where Jesus was crucified 2000 years later!

- (i) Abraham - In the place of worship and total surrender, God provided everything Abraham needed. God became everything Abraham needed. God is shaking everything on earth so that only the things which cannot be shaken will remain. How much shaking do we need until we know God is all we need?
- (ii) God- On Calvary hill, God provided everything humanity will ever need in Jesus Christ His Son as the perfect sacrifice.

d. Abraham’s obedience and worship had the most profound and permanent impact on God’s heart.

- (i) Abraham refused to turn back, but pressed on to ascend the hill of Moriah to offer his most precious son to God in worship, with the cut wood carried on his son’s back. What did this mean to God the Father who had His beloved Son of delight about to be given for mankind? This revelation was not given at the time.

What did God the Father see from heaven as he received Abraham’s worship? God saw His own Son carrying the cross up to Calvary. ‘...Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.’ (Rev 13:8). The Father carried the wound of the cross in His heart from the foundation of the world. Abraham’s worship of offering Isaac ministered to the heart of God in ways no angel in heaven could touch the Father’s heart in a billion years. Unlike the offering of Isaac which God stopped on Mt Moriah, God the Father was not going to withhold His Son for the children of Abraham.

- (ii) God sealed his blessing of Abraham in an oath, ‘By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son – blessing I will bless you, and multiplying, I will multiply your descendants’ (22:17. C.f. Heb 6:13-20).

Abraham’s worship perfected Abraham’s faith. After this, we see no more tests for Abraham.

- (iii) Abraham is the only person in the OT called a friend of God. ‘...Abraham Your friend forever.’ (2 Chr 20:7; Is. 41:8; James 2:23) ‘Father seeks true worshippers who worship God in spirit and truth.’ Abraham was a true worshipper and God found in Abraham a friend. ‘And he was called a friend of God.’ (James 2:23) God is seeking a friend, who will passionately give the first place and the highest affection to God.

3. How do We Worship God as a New Covenant Believer?

‘I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.’ (Rom 12:1-2)

- a. In the same way, Abraham’s worshipped God in offering Isaac, his joy and pride, we in the new covenant must offer our body as a living sacrifice on the altar to the Lord because of God’s mercy and love poured out in the cross of Jesus Christ. Paul calls this ‘act of offering our body to God’ our ‘reasonable service’ or ‘spiritual act of worship.’ (NIV)

Just like the burnt offering of animal sacrifice, once you offer yourself to God, you cannot take it back. This kind of worship in the love for the Lord cannot proceed out of soulish love. This kind of worship comes out of receiving the ‘love of God’ (in the cross of Christ) through the Spirit who searches even the deep things of God. Worship arises from grasping God’s love for us. We love God because He first loved us!

- b. There are two major centers of revelation in our spirit, out of which deep worship flows. It is the revelation of the ‘holiness of God’, and the revelation of the ‘worthiness of God’.

- (i) John was taken up to the throne of God, which is saturated with unceasing worship of His holiness, ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!’ (Rev 4:8) - God’s holiness; God’s sovereignty; God’s eternity. This worship flows out of the revelation of the beauty of God’s holiness, which forever captured the highest of angelic beings in heaven.

Isaiah saw the same vision of God in the 8th century BC - seraphim singing, *'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!'* (Is 6:3) This vision of God's holiness devastated Isaiah's self-dependence, self-sufficiency, and self-righteousness! This encounter produced true repentance and return in Isaiah, *'Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.'* (Is 6:5).

- (ii) John too encountered the worship before the throne of God. However, John saw something the OT prophets did not see clearly. He saw and heard a 'new song' sung in heaven from the time of death and resurrection of Christ (5:8). It starts with the word 'worthy' – the root word for 'worship' (C.f. Anglo-Saxon word: 'weorthscipe'.)

'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, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.' (Rev 5:9-10).

'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honour and glory and blessing!' (Rev 5:12).

True worship is giving God all these seven things instead of taking them for ourselves. How much fight and war go on in the world and in our lives because we grasp at these things not given to us?

- c. In response to His love for us, we say back to God, 'I love You. I withhold nothing from You. I trust You no matter what comes. I affirm your goodness even when I do not understand or see clearly - just like Abraham could not see the goodness of God when He asked for his son - I withhold nothing from you. I offer the rest of my life and my body for your glory. All my affection is in You. I put nothing before You. You are my highest joy and treasure. YHWH-Jireh. You are more than enough. You are all I need.'

Which religion on earth worships God by saying, 'I love you, God, because of Your love for me'? This is the foundation of our worship in spirit and truth.

God spoke to Abraham when He entered into covenant with Abraham, *'Do not be afraid Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.'* (Gen 15:1) At that time Abraham did not understand it. He cried, 'But Lord, I don't have a son!' Finally, as He offered that precious son to the Lord (Gen 22), Abraham saw it. In the words of Asaph's confession: *'Whom have I love in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.'*