

Restoring the Jewishness of the Gospel  
What a Jew Can Teach a Gentile About Worship  
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According to the late Jerusalem Rabbi Eliezar Berkovits -- "In its effect on the life of Jewish people, Christianity's New Testament has been the most dangerous anti-Semitic tract in history."

The pendulumic extremes to either indict or exonerate the Jewish people for the death of Jesus has vacillated with the ecclesiastical politics throughout the history of the church. Central to that discussion has been the use of the term "Jews" in the Gospel of John. Much ink has been used and too much has been wasted in such a limited discussion of Johannine theology. What has been lost is the prevailing Jewish themes and settings that in reality support the essential Jewish nature of the Gospel – not the least of which is the high Christology portrayed through Jesus self-identifications and his interactions in the Jewish capital during the course of three festival weeks of the Jewish calendar.

Following the prologue and introduction of Jesus and his followers, a part of the literary art of the fourth Gospel shows Jesus to be the life, light, and love that is needed by all. Beginning with the Jews and progressing to the Gentiles John records personal encounters pinned on the geographical map in Jerusalem, Judea, in Samaria and finally in Galilee the author demonstrates that . . .

Jewish people need Jesus  
Samaritans need Jesus  
Roman Noblemen need Jesus  
Those in Galilee of the Gentiles need Jesus  
John's grand scheme is that everyone needs what only a Jewish Messiah named Jesus can provide!

A set of back to back examples illustrates this well!  
In John 3 and 4 we have with Nicodemus and the Samaritan Woman is a study of contrasts

<u>Nicodemus</u>	<u>Samaritan Woman</u>
Man	Woman

Jew	Samaritan
He came seeking Jesus	Jesus went seeking her
Moral Leader	Morally compromised Lady
Metaphor of 2 <sup>nd</sup> Birth	Metaphor of Water
No immediate response	She becomes a testimony to the region
Bic said . . . “We know”	The Samaritan woman said . . . “I know”

Both know not that they know not what Jesus knows they need to know!

**The structure of 4:1-43: (Charles Talbert, *Reading John*, p. 120)**

- A. Jesus goes to Galilee (4:3)
  - B. Jesus needs to drink (4:7)
    - C. Jesus' witness to the woman (4:16-18)
      - D. True worship explained by Messiah (4:20-26)
    - C' The woman's witness for Jesus (4:28-29)
  - B' Jesus need to eat (4:31)
- A' Jesus goes to Galilee (4:43)

The material falls into two parts built around two imperatives (“Give me,” vv. 7b–15; “Go, call, come,” vv. 16–26), each of which contains three exchanges between Jesus and the woman. In the first Jesus reveals Himself to be the water of life

In the second Jesus reveals the nature of true wordship. While both will emphasize the Jewishness of the Gospel it is the second half of the narrative that concerns us this evening.

Ironically there are 2 “sixth hours” in John One in 4:6 and the other in 19:14.

Knowing what will happen at the second one (19:14) allows Jesus to share the truths in the first (4:6). He alone can give that which alone can satisfy the real needs of one’s life.

In both the humanity of his thirst is manifested and in both the power of his deity is revealed.

Whether meant as a diversion created by her sense of shame for her marital history or out of a sincere desire to have her new acquaintance settle an age-

old debate, her statement or disguised question about which mountain should be held sacred for worship opened the door for a Jew to tell a Gentile, yea even a Samaritan, about the nature of worship that God accepts– worship soon to be radically transformed by the Messiah Himself.

Her statement in John 4:20 – “**Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.**” highlights the controversial history of the people and the place. The Samaritans did not consider anything beyond the Pentateuch to be sacred Scripture.

The Samaritans had adjusted Jewish history to suit themselves. They taught that it was on Mt. Gerezim that Abraham had been willing to sacrifice Isaac (It was Mt Moriah=Jerusalem); that it was at Gerezim that Melchizedek had appeared to Abraham; and that upon entering the land of Canaan as per the final instructions of Moses the people were to set up an altar of worship to the Lord there (Deut. 27:4 says it was to be on Mt Ebal.).

Therefore, lost to them were the multipole references to Jerusalem as the place where God chose to stake a claim for both his name and his fame. (2 Chron. 6:6, 7:12, Ps. 78:68).

After the Return from the Babylonian Captivity, a rival temple was erected on Mount Gerizim about 400 B. C. later to be destroyed by John Hyrcanus about 129 B.C.;

- “Our fathers” – is contrasted to “you all” (you plural)

*“Our fathers”* -- Abraham and Jacob, (Gen. 12:7; 33:20) had erected altars at Shechem near the slopes of Mt. Gerizim. (For the instructions for the antiphonal blessing and cursing cf. also Deut. 11:29, 27:12).

- “This mountain” is also set in juxtaposition to “in Jerusalem”

The Greek verb “dei” with the complimentary infinitive found in verses 20 and 24 expresses the “divine will” – “it is necessary”

To this Jesus responds, and the Jewishness of Jesus and the fundamentals of worship come into view. Ten of John's thirteen uses of the Greek word for *worship* appear in these few verses.

As stated by Borchert, "The statements of Jesus in vv. 21–24 are . . . far more than arguments in a conversation with a woman. They provide a window into the depth of Johannine theology."<sup>1</sup>

I would like to suggest five words as a mnemonic set to remind us of necessities about the kind of worship God accepts. The first comes from the opening of verse 21:

<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming . . . [when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.]

1. **Opportunity:** We live at a great time for the worship of God.

ἔρχεται ὥρα, "an hour is coming 7 times in John  
4:23; 5:21; 5:25; 5:28; 16:2; 16:25; 16:32

The concept of "an hour is coming" = timing is twofold in John – there is a specific time for Jesus to accomplish his mission through his passion the salvation that will glorify both Himself and the Father. In addition, there are the preparatory predictions of Jesus of both the advantages the cross will bring as well as the coming cultural conflicts the followers of Jesus will face. Jesus wants us to understand his times and ours are both in his plan and in his hands.

In the second half of verse 20 we have a startling announcement!

<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming . . . when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.

My second word is . . .

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, vol. 25A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 208.

2. **Locality:** (the place of worship) - Place is no longer a help nor a hindrance to worship.

*this mountain* - Mt. Gerezim    *in Jerusalem* - Mt. Zion

But think about his statement – no longer will worship be centralized in Jerusalem. Jesus just pulled the pin and roiled the grenade down the table of Judaism!

For those of us who, as I certainly do, believe in a future for ethnic Israel, their return to the land, their repentance and restoration of worship, this change in worship is for the immediate future - the inter-advent period of God's s kingdom program. In the earthly kingdom there will be a repositioning of Jerusalem as the theological center and City of truth as expected from Exekiel 40-48, Zechariah 8, and other prophetic texts.

Our third word comes from verse 22:

<sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

My third word is

3. **Validity:** The Way of Worship - There is a right way and a wrong way to worship.

*what you don't know* - the rest of what the OT proscribed and predicted  
*what we know* - "*salvation is of the Jews*" Jewish Messiah as promised.

Race – Human  
Nation – Israel  
Tribe – Judah  
Family – David  
Gender – a Son  
Birth – Virgin Mary  
Identity – the Son of God

By neglecting what God had said in the totality of the Hebrew Bible, they had not only missed the “where” but had missed the “what” of worship – they missed the true Subject/Object of worship and all the ways and reasons for why He should be worshiped.

ἡμεῖς is emphatic – we worship what we do know!

Jesus wasn't afraid to correct theological error and expose an empty faith.

Psalm 147:19–20 (ESV)

<sup>19</sup> He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and rules to Israel. <sup>20</sup> He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his rules. Praise the LORD!

The Jews were the chosen people, and as Paul affirmed in Romans 9:4-5

<sup>4</sup> . . . to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises, <sup>5</sup> whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (NASB95)

The Jewish nature of the Gospel could not be more bluntly stated – salvation is of/or originates with the Jews [ἐκ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἐστίν].

“the salvation” – ἡ σωτηρία - the sum total of what God promised to the OT prophets and what Jesus announced with all its benefits past present and future– forgiveness for sins, life in the Spirit and the hope of heaven.

May I suggest a fourth mnemonic?

<sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

4. **Integrity:** the nature of worship. The essence of God determines the expression of worship.

But the hour is coming, and is now here

In the mind of our Lord the perfected state of the future is foreshadowed in the present.

“Now is – when they will . . .”

"God is spirit" (not a Spirit) -  
"in Spirit and in truth" -

The nature and knowledge of true worship becomes more fully understood in the expanded revelation Jesus and reality of spiritual life in Christ. The shadowing rituals of the OT which anticipated NT realities are being transformed by the work of the Son and the coming ministry of the Spirit.

For true worship there must be compatible spiritual affinity between the Worshipped and the worshipper.

Genuine worshipers not only *will* worship the Father in spirit and truth; they *must* do so.

Jesus places his own *must* over against that of the woman (cf. 4:24 with 4:20).<sup>2</sup> Hers was a requirement of space – His is a requirement of the spirit.

"in spirit" - Authentic worship happens only when the very core of our being is employed in worshipping God!<sup>3</sup>

The often-quoted definition of worship by William Temple is appropriate here!

"For worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose—and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable, and therefore, the chief remedy for that self-centeredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin."—William Temple

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<sup>2</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. 1, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 168.

<sup>3</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *John: That You May Believe*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 118.

“in truth” means that we are to worship what is true about God. In other words, worshipping “in truth” occurs when we worship in accordance with what God has revealed about himself.

“for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.” He is looking!

The central reality in worship is not that we are seeking God, but that he is seeking us!<sup>4</sup>

And to reinforce the need for integrity in our worship . . . Jesus links the nature of worship to the nature of the Father.

John 4:24 (ESV)

<sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

I like Beasley-Murray’s explanation here:

“God is Spirit” defines God, not so much in his metaphysical being, but “according to his work in the world.” The clause is parallel in this respect with ‘God is light’ (1 John 1:5) and ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:8); “All these statements describe *God’s mode of action and working*”<sup>5</sup>

Kent Hughes maintains - Worship – “is the highest function in which our souls can be involved. The very highest!”<sup>6</sup>

From the final exchange of the woman and Jesus in verses 25 and 26 we come to our last word -

5. **Authority:** Jesus is God's anointed means of access to and mediation with the Father.

- She says

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<sup>4</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *John: That You May Believe*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 119.

<sup>5</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, vol. 36, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1999), 62.

<sup>6</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *John: That You May Believe*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 115.

John 4:25–26 (ESV)

<sup>25</sup> The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.”

The woman’s expectation of the coming messianic figure was of one who would reveal “all things,” consistent with the Samaritan expectation of a Mosaic-like Prophet or *Taheb*. John added the interpretative note for his Greek readers that the Messiah is the one called “Christ” (4:25).<sup>7</sup>

- He says

<sup>26</sup> Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.”

The supreme moment of Messianic self-disclosure has arrived. Jesus said to her, *I, who speak to you, am He.*<sup>8</sup>

Echoing the resounding theme in the Gospel – a Jewish man named Jesus is identified as the I Am! This Jew named Jesus is the

Bread of life  
Light of the World  
Door of the Sheep  
Good Shepherd  
Resurrection and Life  
The Way, the Truth, and the Life  
The True Vine

Even before Abraham was . . . Jesus said he is!

I love how Hendriksen and Kistemaker put it:

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<sup>7</sup> Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, vol. 25A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 209.

<sup>8</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. 1, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 168.

“This is the greatest surprise of all! But this is also the *only* solution to all problems and the only answer to all the questions that have arisen in this woman’s heart.<sup>9</sup> [and in ours or anyone else’s].

This Jew who was weary and thirsty who identified with us in his full humanity is also fully deity who provides for us the only satisfying drink that outlasts all others.

As the the narrative ultimately concludes . . . even the Samaritans came to see a Jew -- this Jew – A Jewish Messiah named Jesus “is truly the Savior of the World.”

To understand this restores Jesus and Jewishness to the Center of the Gospel and the whole of Biblical Revelation.

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- A new Opportunity**
- A freedom of Locality**
- A required Validity**
- A spiritual Integrity**
- A respected Authority**

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<sup>9</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. 1, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 168–169.