

Worship in Spirit and Truth

John 4:19-30, Quinquagesima Sunday

February 26, 2006

Beloved of the Lord.....You hear it all the time. People say that it doesn't matter which god you worship, as long as you worship your god from the heart it really doesn't matter what you believe. People will say "Who cares if you are a Jew, Muslim, Hindu, Mormon, or Protestant. If you sincerely believe in your god, that is enough. They're all the same anyways." This is what they say. You hear it all the time.

But people who believe such things are absolutely wrong, and we should tell them so. Moreover we should not be ashamed to confess the True God, our Lord Jesus Christ who said, "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven." Mt. 10:32 Such people need to know there is only one God, the Triune God. Those who believe in Jesus Christ for the remission of sins will die and go to heaven, all others will go to hell.

But if you tell such people these things, what do you think will happen? You will notice an immediate change in their behavior. Most likely they will get angry at you. They will belittle you for thinking yours is the only true God. They will say you are a proud and arrogant to believe only Christians go to heaven. They might even say you are narrow-minded or call you names.

The world hates Christ. It wants nothing to do with Him. But the world prefers to remain in the darkness of sin. We should pray for such people, witness to them, and not be ashamed of the truth which we possess, namely the truth of Jesus Christ. For He is indeed the only way to heaven, as He has said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Jn 14:6

Christians know what and who they worship. They worship Jesus Christ as their complete and perfect Savior from sin. They worship God the Father and the Holy Spirit, for God has revealed Himself as three distinct persons, yet one God. Our God is the only one there is. "Besides me, there is no other" God says. "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God." The True God plainly tells us all other gods of the earth are idols - mere figments or inventions of man's imagination. Moreover the gods that the world offers us cannot save. They have no power to redeem. When it comes down to it, there are only two religions in the world. One is a religion of grace where God comes to save mankind from man's own sin and self-destruction. The other is a religion of works, where man seeks to save himself from sin by good works. Thank be to God we know which one is true. Let us now learn how we can be true worshippers of the one and only true God.

I. The generic god which the world worships. In the Samaritan woman of our lesson today, we have an example of the world which worships generic gods. As a race, the

Samaritan people were a product of interracial marriages. The Jews of the land had intermarried with the Babylonians. Their religion therefore was a mix between Judaism and paganism. While they knew the Messiah was coming, he was more of a generic figure to them. Their faith was placed in a generic non-existent god. They trusted in their works to save them.

But this sounds like our world today doesn't it? So many churches teach and preach a generic god. Many have taken Jesus Christ out of their prayers because they deem it an offensive and divisive name. In these generic religions, god is just floating out there somewhere and you really can't nail him down. They teach little about sin, or the dreadful consequences it brings. The true Word of God is taught less and less in such churches. Who Jesus is, what He said, and what He did become less and less important. God's Word becomes more of a guide than a rule, more of a suggestion than an outright law. Everything becomes watered down until there is no hell or heaven. God becomes a very generic figure which no one can be sure or certain about. People begin to follow their hearts instead of God's Word or their conscience. Such people are totally lost and religiously without a clue. Their generic god will not save them when they lie on their death bed.

II. The foolishness of lip service. This was the case of the Samaritan woman, before she ran into Jesus. From Jesus own words we see that she didn't really know who she was worshipping. Jesus even said, "Ye know not what ye worship." Though she faithfully attended the worship services like any other good Samaritan, she was going through the motions, worshipping in vain, hoping to appease her generic god by lip service.

Again this is a parallel to our world today. Consider the millions who go to church faithfully every Sunday, singing the liturgy, praying their prayers, dressed in their Sunday best, but who is their heart worshipping? Are they really worshipping the True God, or is all their worship in vain? Indeed the true God hates lip service. To the Jews of the Old Testament He said, "Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; *it is iniquity.*" Is. 1:13 As a whole, the Jewish people in the Old Testament had fallen away from faith. True, they still sacrificed as God commanded, but it was a sacrifice without faith, much like that of Cain's sacrifice. They no longer trusted in the Messiah to redeem them from their sins. All their worship was in vain, mere lip service which meant nothing to God. The Lord said "Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear *them.*" Is. 1:14 The Lord hates lip service.

Perhaps now we nod our head in agreement? Yes, there is much hypocrisy in those other churches. Or perhaps we say, "I'm glad I'm not like that, or like those

people!" But here our own words condemn us do they not? Are we really all that different? For even when faith lives in the heart and we have the glorious comfort of the Gospel truth, we still have that Old Adam within - and that Old Adam is a terrible hypocrite. Consider for a moment Hymn #293 entitled "O Holy Spirit grant us grace." We all sang this hymn maybe ten minutes ago. When we sang the hymn, did we think about every phrase? Did we mean all the words which we sang? Likewise when we pray the Lord's prayer, do we pray every petition from the heart? We are condemned when Jesus says, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me." Mt. 15:8 Thanks be to God that Jesus Christ was never a hypocrite and He meant every word He said. For His lips always spoke the truth. And how thankful we can be that His lips often spoke the glorious words of the Gospel saying, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

III. True worship is the fruit of the Gospel truth. As Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman, she was drawn to His Word. Jesus had already offered her the living water of the Gospel which springs up into everlasting life. Jesus had also convicted her conscience of sin. She had been married five times, and she presently was unmarried, living in sin. But she was now sorry for this. Now she longed for salvation. Jesus said to her "salvation is of the Jews." When the woman said, "I know that the Messiah is coming", Jesus said to her, "I that speak unto you am He!" Here before her very eyes was the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God sent to redeem the world of sin! Jesus was (and still is), the living and breathing Gospel, her ticket to heaven. If she would only drink of the water that Jesus offered, namely believe in the forgiveness of sins through Him, she would have a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

This is the Gospel truth that the Lord would have live in our hearts as well. God would that men everywhere not only repent of their sins, but believe in the Gospel. For wherever the Gospel is received in the heart, there will be a change in the heart of man. The Bible says a man is justified "by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ." To be justified by faith is to apply the work of Jesus Christ on the cross to yourself. It speaks on this wise, "Since Christ died for all, that means that Christ died for me." This faith brings peace to the heart. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." When this Gospel truth lives in the heart by faith, we no longer are servants and slaves to sin, but we hate sin and love Christ Jesus our Savior.

Where such faith lives and reigns in the heart, there will be thankfulness and praise. As Jesus said "The true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth:

for the Father seeketh such to worship him." True worship then is the fruit of the Gospel truth which lives in the believer's heart. Now when we sing "Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed His blood for me", we know what it means. Now when we sing, "On Christ the solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand", we know what it means. By the same token, those without faith in Jesus Christ are totally unable to worship Him in spirit and in truth. For how can anyone worship Christ when they do not know Him by faith? "Without faith it is impossible to please Him."

Let God be praised that He has brought us to the knowledge of truth. He has not only created faith within our hearts, but He leads us by His Spirit to worship Him in truth! Though at times, due to our flesh we still have hypocrisy, by God's grace our faith is still alive and well, and it will still sing in spirit and in truth. How thankful we can be that the Lord hears our prayers and songs in spite of our sin, for He sees the garment of faith upon us. He sees the righteousness of Christ. And when we sing our hymns of praise, due to the righteousness of Christ, our hymns sound like the hymns of angels whether we are on or off key.

Where faith in the Gospel reigns, there likewise will be the desire within us to amend our sinful ways. Not only do we repent of our sins and look to Christ for the comfort of forgiveness, but we also turn away from our sins for we know they bring nothing but death and destruction. We ask forgiveness of those we've sinned against. We tell others what the Bible teaches and we are not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. We fight our own sinful flesh and the lusts which war against our soul. We humble ourselves or permit ourselves to be humbled, rather than let pride dominate and rule us. In short, we gladly submit to the laws of God, knowing they are for our own benefit. And most important of all, we turn again and again to Christ Jesus and His Gospel Words. For there is great strengthen in the forgiveness of sins. There is strength for our souls.

Beloved in the Lord, our God is merciful and gracious unto us every day and we should know it. He desires that we worship and praise His holy name as well, like the angels in heaven so faithfully do. Moreover, He desires that we worship Him with a true heart and a right spirit. Mean what you say and say what you mean. Indeed Jesus Christ is our perfect Mediator between God and man. The Lord hears all our prayers for the sake of Jesus Christ. Take comfort then dear Christian, for even though there is much hypocrisy in our lives, there was no hypocrisy in Christ Jesus our Lord. He fulfilled the law for our sake. And He is ever faithful to us throughout our lives. Believe in this Jesus as this dear Samaritan woman learned to do. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. Amen.