

# Worship in Spirit and Truth

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Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42

## Introduction

Most of us can remember an experience where we reached a moment of truth, a full realisation of our true situation – for better or worse. It usually initiates action of some sort. Consider that moment when Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and saw that they were naked. Reach for the fig leaves! We're seeing ourselves as God sees us – nothing hidden, nowhere to hide – the naked truth revealed because we're face to face with the living God.

However, we're God's people and in a covenant relationship with promises of commitment on both sides. Both may see the truth. Consider that moment when God heard the cries of the wilderness-wandering Hebrews in their thirst, for water ... and for faithfulness from their God! God seeing Godself as seen by God's people, nothing hidden, nowhere to hide. The omnipotent One willing to be revealed. God face to face with lives created in God's own image: both thirsting and thirsting for righteousness, impartial justice, and above all, faithfulness. Do the right thing and keep your promise. Stick to the covenant we made. Show your love through faithfulness. Let us trust you: don't let us down!

Then we have moments of truth which bring joy and delight, so rejoice and show thanks! Consider that moment when a woman of Samaria, that once a great city of the northern kingdom of Israel, met Jesus of Nazareth. She related to God under the covenant canopy of truth and faith, thirsting for God's impartial justice.

**John 4:5-42**

Jesus was travelling from Judea to Galilee and had to go through Samaria. Tired out by his journey, he sat by Jacob's well at the noon hour. A woman of that country came alone to draw water, and he said to her: "Give me a drink" and they argued together. We all know that this was highly unusual: a Jewish rabbi and a Samaritan woman, discussing, debating, arguing.

Then came the moment of truth. The woman became aware that she was known, that he saw her: nothing hidden from him. 'Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, "I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"' She was pulled up short. How did he know? Surprised, probably, nevertheless she accepted what Jesus said as the truth: no denial, or dissembling, Her faith stood that test! Then she uttered a truth to Jesus about his people. She put the faith of God working in Jesus to the test, just as the Hebrews in the wilderness had done. "We thirst. Give us water or we'll die."

The Samaritan woman said: "Our ancestors (that is, the people of the northern kingdom of Israel) worshipped on THIS mountain, but YOU (that is, the people of the southern kingdom of Judah) say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."

In her eyes, the sin of Jesus' people was that of making the observance of the whole law almost impossible for them. One law broken was the law broken. The Samaritans had the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible containing the law. However, the southern kingdom of Judah centralised sacrificial worship to the temple in Jerusalem, which was a long way for Samaritans to travel.

She voiced the deep grief and resentment of her people's loss of this vital part of their identity: taken by the people to

whom they were most closely related spiritually. The Samaritans thirsted for recognition from the Jews of the truth of their claim to belong also to the people of God, to Israel.

Most unusually, this woman was not afraid to answer back, arguing with the truth as she saw it to this Jewish man. Jesus said to the woman, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem...the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

What has Jesus done for her with his words? He has heard that the Samaritans wanted to pursue righteousness according to the law and given her hope. God's impartial justice transcended the current realities, 'neither this ... nor that'. He gave a glimpse of 'beyond' where things could and would be different. He pointed to a beyond, where neither his people nor her people could claim a religious imperative tied to place. Nothing would change her historical or current personal circumstances immediately. But she could be inwardly freed from their shackles, transcend them, based on a righteousness of faith, hope, and love. Faith that needs would be met 'I'll give you living water', hope for the future 'believe ... the hour is coming ...', and love '... the Father seeks such ... as ... worship in spirit and truth', like you, not necessarily those who keep the law alone.

Whether she was guilty of sexual impropriety or had been subjected to the loss of husbands by death or divorce, she was loved and shown a saving way. She could worship the God of Samaritans and Jews in spirit and truth within her current circumstances, in her life, and in any place. Wherever she and anyone else worshipped in spirit and truth, God would be present. Grasping this saving way, she spoke of the Messiah, and Jesus confirmed her in the truth she thought she saw: "I am he, the one who is speaking to you." He was the sign for

her that God was there at the well. Not only that, but the saviour of the Jews was her saviour, too: just as she was.

Seeing this spring of life begin to assuage her thirst, was food indeed for Jesus: a spiritual food more satisfying than ordinary food. Letting go of resentment, the woman joyfully took the living, life-giving water now bubbling inside her, back to her city, and told what had happened at the old well. More Samaritans came and Jesus gave them that same spiritual food and drink. Then the Samaritans said to the woman: "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world." He was more than the Messiah for whom his people thirsted. The Samaritans prophesied that Jesus is the Saviour for **all** persons and peoples thirsting for faith and hope in an uncertain or hostile world – thirsting for loving-kindness that releases spiritual bonds and brings forth joy and right-living.

It is for we who have experienced such loving-kindness to communicate to those who thirst – those grieving, weeping, withdrawn, isolated, shouting, or acting out of their spiritual poverty – that we have met this Saviour and offer them the experience of a certain Samaritan woman at a well on a certain day at noon who worshipped in spirit and truth.