

COMMENTARY ON JOHN

LESSON NUMBER 47

John 4:23 ***“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. ²⁴God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.”***(John 4:23-24)

THE HOUR IS COMING, AND NOW IS

INTRODUCTION

God Himself is described as a *“a very present Help in trouble”* (Psa 46:1). Men may not always be cognizant of this presence – like the woman at Jacob’s well. However, as we will find, she did stand in need of *“help,”* and the Lord saw to it that she received it. She said enough to reveal something of her heart. She was familiar with what the Samaritan fathers taught about the place to worship and what was taught by the Jews. We will find that she knew something about the coming of *“a Messiah, which is called Christ”* (John 4:25). There is no evidence, however, that she had ever engaged in a quest to find Him. If this is so, then here is a case where Christ was found by someone *“who sought Him not”* (Isa 65:1; Rom 10:20). Through Isaiah God said, *“I said, Behold Me, behold Me, unto a nation that was not called by My Name”* (Isa 65:1). This text is an introduction to such Divine initiative. The same was true of the Gadarene demoniac (Lk 8:26-35), the widow of Nain (Lk 7:12-15), and the Syrophencian woman (Mk 7:26-30). After all, Jesus did say, *“For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost”* (Luke 19:10). Zaccheus sought to see Jesus as He passed by, and Jesus called him down from a tree saying, *“Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house”* (Luke 19:5). Zaccheus was “found.”

There are also other statements of a Divine initiative: “The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart” “The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon him in truth” (Psa 34:18; 145:18). This nearness is not always perceived – but it can be believed, and a person can live confidently with the close proximity of the Lord in mind. This perception can effectively offset allurements to troubling care and debilitating fear.

Perceiving this Divine manner brings great comfort to the heart of a believer. The life of faith is often attended by questions and concerns that can trouble the heart – like Martha’s heart troubled her when Mary chose to sit and listen to Jesus. **However when we choose to live, so to speak, within the range of the Lord Jesus, He will often take the initiative, and gently lead us into a broader perspective. He is, praise the Lord, the “Great Shepherd of the sheep”** (Heb 13:20).

“THE HOUR COMETH, AND NOW IS

John 4:23 ***“But the hour cometh, and now is”***

The Lord Jesus was always operating with **the greater things** being prominent. While He was fully aware of *“the times”* in which He lived, He was not unduly distracted by them. At the time He entered into the world, there was a serious decline from the truth of God. Only a proportionately few people were living in expectation – men like Nathanael (John 1:45), and Joseph

of Arimathaea (Lk 23:51). Jesus, however, was focused on what His Father was doing, and spoke of it to this woman.

THE HOUR COMETH. Other versions read, *"the hour is coming,"* ^{NKJV} *"an hour is coming,"* ^{NASB} *"Yet a time is coming,"* ^{NIV} *"the hour is now coming,"* ^{NRSV} *"the time is coming,"* ^{CJB} and *"A time will come."* ^{AMPLIFIED}

The language – *"the hour cometh"* – spoke of a distinct and relatively instant beginning. The word translated *"hour"* (hora) means *"ANY DEFINITE TIME, POINT OF TIME, MOMENT,"* ^{THAYER} *"THE TIME SET FOR SOMETHING HOUR, APPOINTED TIME ."* ^{FRIBERG}

Before Jesus returned to heaven, He reminded His disciples that *"times"* and *"seasons"* are exclusively in God's power (Acts 1:7). Abraham's son Isaac, was born at a Divinely *"set time"* (Gen 17:21; 21:2). The plagues God sent upon Egypt were at a set TIME (Ex 9:5). Israel was delivered from Egypt at a precisely appointed time: *"And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt"* (Ex 12:41). Jesus was sent into the world in *"the fulness of time,"* or *"when the time had fully come"* ^{NIV} (Gal 4:4). God has *"appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead"* (Acts 17:31).

Therefore, when Jesus said, *"The hour cometh,"* He was speaking of an appointed time that was standing at the door – a time for which men had to be ready. It was the hour of Satan's defeat (Heb 2:14), and the plundering of principalities and powers (Col 2:15) – the time when reconciliation (Heb 2:17) would be made, men would be *"made righteous"* (Rom 5:19), the new covenant would be *"made"* (Heb 8:8-10), and *"repentance and remission of sins"* would be *"preached"* (Lk 24:47). The coming *"hour"* would be *"the day of salvation"* and *"the accepted time"* (2 Cor 6:2).

Relatively few people in the world, or history had even an introductory understanding of what sin had done to mankind, and what it meant to be *"alienated from the life of God"* (Eph 4:18), and *"dead in trespasses and sins"* (Eph 2:1). The reason for this ignorance was not the lack of human intelligence. Men were able to come up with *"many inventions"* (Eccl 7:29), some of them being most remarkable. Yet, no one was able to come up with an effective way to approach God, obtain remission, or be transformed. The *"hour"* of which Jesus spoke thoroughly addressed all of those matters.

AND NOW IS. Other versions read, *"indeed, it's here now,"* ^{CJB} and *"however, indeed it is already here."* ^{AMPLIFIED} The *"day of salvation"* was beginning to rise, and would come to its apex when Jesus died, rose again, and was seated at the right hand of God. Jesus announced this in His hometown synagogue, declaring that the following was being fulfilled in their hearing:

(1) Preaching the Gospel to the poor, (2) healing the broken hearted, (3) preaching deliverance to the captives, (4) recovering the sight of the blind, (5) setting at liberty them that are bruised, and (6) preaching the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk 4:18-19).

Before Jesus commenced His mediatorial and intercessory ministry, God would establish Him as the appointed Savior. Peter said of Christ's earthly ministry, *"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him"* (Acts 10:38). The kind of rule Jesus would exercise would be miraculous, powerful, being fulfilled in a moral and spiritual arena. He did not come to eliminate physical poverty. He did not come to liberate Israel from Roman rule. He would *"establish equity,"* and *"execute judgment and righteousness"* (Psa 99:4). **His visible miracles were depictions of coming inward realities** – the deaf hearing, the blind seeing, lame men leaping, and the dumb speaking (Isa 35:5). There was also the raising of the dead (Lk 7:11; Mk 5:40-42; John 11:43-44), and the healing of debilitating diseases like leprosy, fever, and paralysis (Matt 8:2-3;

Matt 8:4-5; John 5:5-9). There was also the casting of evil spirits out of their victims (Matt 8:16). He calmed stormy and destructive winds, and quieted raging waters (Mk 4:39-41), and fed multitudes of men and woman with handfuls of food (Matt 14:17-21; 15:34-38).

In all of these miracles, there was absolutely no indication of Jesus being challenged by a debilitating or enfeebling condition. Whatever He perceived was needed, He supplied. Whatever power was required, He had it. This was all a vivid depiction of salvation. Although spiritual challenges are infinitely greater than physical ones, they are no more challenging to Jesus than the blindness, deafness, lameness, and diseases that He confronted. He can dismiss the devil as easily as He ordered demons to leave their victims. The difficulties are found with men, who often had to cry out, *"Help Thou mine unbelief"* (Mk 9:24). There must come a time when we see the Son of God through the lens of His earthly ministry.

TRUE WORSHIPPERS

"^{23B} . . . when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him . . ."

The word *"worshippers"* occurs six times in the King James Bible (2 Kgs 10:19,21,22,23; John 4:23; Heb 10:2), nine times in the New King James (1Kgs 10:19,21,22,23; Zeph 3:10; John 4:23; Acts 17:17; Heb 10:2; 11:1), ten times in the New American Standard (2 Kgs 10:19,21,22,23; Zeph 3:10; John 4:23; Heb 10:2), and seven times in the New International (Zeph 3:10; Lk 1:10; John 4:23,24; Heb 10:2; Rev 11:1). Of all of those references, twelve refer to worshippers of Baal (2 Kgs 19,21,22,23), one to *"worshippers of images"* (Psa 97:7 ^{NRSV}), one to Gentile worshipers in a Jewish synagogue (Acts 17:17 ^{NKJV}), six to the dialog covered in this lesson (John 4:23,24), five to Jews under the Law, with particular regard to the day of atonement (Heb 10:2).

Defined lexically, a *"worshiper"* is "ONE WHO DISPLAYS DEVOTION TOWARD A DEITY," ^{FRIBERG} "HOMAGE PAID TO A SUPERIOR, ESPECIALLY TO GOD (WHICH WE CONSIDER ONLY), USUALLY EXPRESSED BY PRAYER, SACRIFICE, AND RITUAL," ^{MCLINTOK & STRONG'S} ONE GIVING "ADORATION" TO GOD, ^{SMITHS} and "HONOR, REVERENCE, HOMAGE, IN THOUGHT, FEELING, OR ACT, PAID TO MEN, ANGELS, OR OTHER "SPIRITUAL" BEINGS, AND FIGURATIVELY TO OTHER ENTITIES, IDEAS, POWERS OR QUALITIES, BUT SPECIFICALLY AND SUPREME TO DEITY." ^{ISBE}

In our time, *"worship"* has come to be equated with singing, but *"worship"* has to do with an attitude of heart that drives expression and homage. The *"worshiper"* values and honors the One he worships. His actions are expressions of his devotion to the One he worships.

THE TRUE WORSHIPPERS. Other versions read, *"true adorers,"* ^{DOUJAY} *"real worshippers,"* ^{WILLIAMS} *"do obeisance,"* ^{ABP} and *"true (genuine) worshippers."* ^{AMPLIFIED} *"True worshippers"* are those who **really do** adore, or regard with loving admiration and devotion, the Living God – *"the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Rom 15:6). Such people are noted for their love of God, faith in God through Jesus Christ, and their obedience to the Lord. Those who are deficient in those areas cannot worship God as He intend. He does not receive token worship – marginal devotion and minimal reliance upon Him – if such things are even possible. Under the Old Covenant religion was equated with routine, and required no faith. Washing was only outward. As a rule, the people themselves were not *"true worshippers."* They could be miraculously delivered from Egypt, see their enemies washed up on the shores of the Red Sea, and commence to murmur because they were hungry and thirsty. Of course, they were not born again, were not being changed from, glory to glory, and did not possess the Holy Spirit. Because they were the seed of Abraham, they were more or less tolerated. I gather that even this was largely owing to a faithful remnant that existed among them, like Moses, Joshua, Caleb, and the Prophets.

However, the days of such worship, Jesus announces, were coming to a grinding halt. God would no longer tolerate heartless religion, and those who think He will are simply wrong – seriously wrong.

SHALL WORSHIP THE FATHER IN SPIRIT. Other versions read, "*in the true way of the spirit,*" ^{BBE} "*worship the Father spiritually,*" ^{CJB} "*in the true, spiritual way,*" ^{LIVING} "*with true spiritual worship,*" ^{WEYMOUTH} "*being led by the Spirit to worship the Father,*" ^{CEV} "*will worship the Father as He really is,*" ^{GNB} and "*Your worship must engage your spirit.*" ^{MESSAGE}

Paul referred to this kind of worship in his epistle to the Philippians: "*For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh*" (Phil 3:3). Although the Holy Spirit is doubtless involved in the worship of God, this text is not a reference to Him. That view, in my judgment, tends to dilute the text. Those who are born again are not helpless, and should never be so represented. They have been born again, and are being constantly changed from one increasing stage of glory to another (2 Cor 4:18). The "*worship*" to which our blessed Lord refers is not traced to the lips, or the hands, or the knees, or any overt action. **It comes from within**, where faith, assurance, confidence, and hope reside. Such people are not conforming to a code, as took place under the Law. They have an attitude toward God that compels their devotion to Him. They listen to His Word, seek His interests, and present their bodies to Him as a living sacrifice. Their spirits, which are the core of their being, are devoted to God.

SHALL WORSHIP THE FATHER IN TRUTH. True worship is **real** worship, **genuine** adoration, **heartfelt** obedience, and a **deep** affection. It is not a routine, a distorted face, or a humanly organized procedure. Worshiping the Father "*in truth*" is worshiping Him without pretension, hypocrisy, or a lack of sincerity – doing so with a "*true heart*" (Heb 10:22).

THE FATHER SEEKETH SUCH TO WORSHIP HIM. This is another way of saying God will not receive any other kind of "*worship.*" Further, wherever it is found, He will not overlook it, or fail to recognize and support the "*worshiper.*" His eyes are running "*to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong in the behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward Him*" (2 Chron 16:9). Such people are those who are worshiping Him in spirit, and in truth.

WORSHIPING IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

"²⁴ God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

GOD IS A SPIRIT. Other versions read, "*God is Spirit,*" ^{NKJV} "*God is a spiritual Being,*" ^{WILLIAMS} "*God is sheer Being itself – spirit.*" ^{MESSAGE} **As Spirit, God stands apart from and above all forms of limitation: time, space, and a body.**

There are three statements made concerning God Himself that particularly make Him known to us. "*God is light*" (1 John 1:5), "*God is love*" (1 John 4:8,16), and "*God is Spirit*" (John 4:23). In these we are to understand that God the **Source** of all **light**, or illumination – "*For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*" (2 Cor 4:6). God is the **Source** of all genuine **love** – "*Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.*" (1 John 4:7). He is also the **Source** of all other **spirits** – "*Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?*" (Heb 12:9). "*True worshippers*" recognize, receive, and honor the Living God in these matters.

THEY THAT WORSHIP HIM. Here is a class of people – those who are separated from all other people by this description: they "*worship God*" (Phil 3:3). There are other gods in the world. As it is written, "*For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him*" (1 Cor 8:5-6). The people represented by the word "**US**" – "*but to us*" – are those who worship God. They

worship Him because they know Him, and have submitted themselves to Him. They receive what He gives, and do what He commands. In fact, **their lives are a continual form of worship.** Now, we will find that “*worship*” must be in conformity with the nature and will of God. God will not receive token, or nominal and trifling “*worship*.”

MUST WORSHIP HIM. Other versions read, “*let His worshippers give Him,*”^{BEBE} “*it is necessary,*”^{CEB} “*must be led by the Spirit to worship Him,*”^{CEV} “*only by the power of His Spirit can people worship Him,*”^{GNB} “*should worship,*”^{MRD} “*it doth behove to worship.*”^{YLT} Most versions read “*must worship Him.*”

The word translated “*must*” [dei] is a strong word. It means “IT IS NECESSARY, THERE IS NEED OF, IT BEHOOVES, IS RIGHT AND PROPER,”^{THAYER} “AS EXPRESSING COMPULSION, NECESSITY, OR INEVITABILITY IN AN EVENT IT IS NECESSARY, ONE MUST, ONE HAS TO,”^{FRIBERG} “THAT WHICH MUST NECESSARILY TAKE PLACE,”^{LOUW-NIDA} “IT IS BINDING ON ONE TO DO A THING, ONE MUST, ONE OUGHT.”^{LIDDELL-SCOTT} What follows is an absolute Divine requirement. Worship that does not conform to this standard simply will not be received. At the best, it will be viewed as idolatry – like sacrificing to demons (1 Cor 10:20). **It also ought to be said that anyone who is in Christ has access to all of the provisions required to fulfill this word.** Be assured of this!

MUST WORSHIP HIM IN SPIRIT. Other versions read, “*way of the Spirit,*”^{BEBE} “*spiritually,*”^{CJB} “*with the spirit,*”^{IE} “*spiritual worship,*”^{WEYMOUTH} “*must be led by the Spirit to worship him,*”^{CEV} “*by the power of his Spirit.*”^{GNB} The emphasis here is that the worship of God **must proceed from within**, as compared with attempting to worship God with our hands (Acts 17:25), or by an empty routine. Our spirits are where we have been made “*alive unto God*” (Rom 6:11), and that is where worship is to originate, and from which it must proceed Godward. This assumes the dominancy of faith and hope by which the individual is living (Heb 3:6; 10:38). While the Holy Spirit is involved, that is not the point of this text.

MUST WORSHIP HIM IN TRUTH. Other versions read, “*the true way,*”^{BEBE} “*truly,*”^{CJB} “*as we should,*”^{LIVING} “*reality,*”^{WILLIAMS} “*according to the truth,*”^{CEV} “*as he really is,*”^{GNB} “*in sincerity,*”^{GOODSPEED} “*out of their . . . true selves,*”^{MESSAGE} and “*reality.*”^{AMPLIFIED} Some versions leave the impression that a correct methodology is to be employed in worship: “*the true way,*”^{CJB} “*as we should,*”^{LIVING} “*according to the truth.*”^{CEV} Aside from the teaching of my good father, for many years I was told this was worship according to the pattern set forth in Scripture. The difficulty with that view is that, for those in Christ, there is no prescribed pattern of worship given in Scripture. Patterns are always preparatory for reality. Worship under the Law did have a pattern, and it was embodied in the Tabernacle service. But such patterns were not intended to pass into the New Covenant.

WORSHIP IN TRUTH IS WORSHIP IN ACCORD WITH THE PERSON OF GOD. God is worshiped as He who is “*above all, and through all, and in you all*” (Eph 4:6). He cannot possibly be worshiped as a secondary influence, or One to whom the professed worshiper has not presented His body a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2), or as One unto whom the person is not living (2 Cor 5:15). If a person is not living by faith and walking in the Spirit, it is not possible to worship God in spirit and in truth. Such a person is alienated from God, and is not welcome in His courts. The proper approach to God is this: “*Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.*” (Heb 10:22).