

True Spiritual Worship

John 4:1-42

John Broadus

Editor's Note: SBJT does not share Broadus' high opinion of Kant's philosophy. We are committed to the primacy of scriptural revelation as opposed to personal religious experience. In Broadus' defense, the full implications of Kant's philosophy could not have been known in 1879 when this sermon was preached.

John A. Broadus (1827-1895) was a founding faculty member and the second president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. One of the most renowned preachers of his day, he was also acknowledged widely as a skilled exegete and Greek expert. His two best-known works, *The Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* and *A Commentary on Matthew* remain in print over a century after his death. This sermon was delivered at the dedication of the Second Baptist Church in St. Louis in 1879 and has been edited for inclusion in SBJT.

Introduction

Jesus was tired. The little that we know of the history just before enables us to see why. He had been, for long months, engaged in active efforts to save men's souls, to lift them out of their sluggishness and worldliness toward God. That is hard work for mind and heart. And he had been at work among many who were hostile. Some of John's disciples were envious that their master was decreasing and another was increasing, though John said this trend was right and good. Further, when the Pharisees heard that Jesus was now making and baptizing more disciples than John, they were jealous. They made it needful that he should withdraw from Judea. So often during his brief ministry he had to withdraw from the jealousy of his enemies or the fanaticism of his friends and seek a new field. Worn out and perhaps sad at heart, the Redeemer sat alone by Jacob's well.

But now there was an opening to do good, and he who "went about doing good" would give up even his needed rest to do good to the least and the lowest. The disciples wondered not that he was ready to do good, for they had seen that often already. Rather, they wondered that he was talking with a woman, for that was contrary to the dignity of a man accord-

ing to the ideas of that time and country. They wondered because they knew not yet what manner of spirit they themselves were of or that they had to deal with high saving truths that break through all weak conventionalities in their own ministries.

They would have wondered more if they had known what he knew full well, which was that she was a woman of bad character, but that he saw in her potencies for good. He won her to faith in the Messiah and sent her forth to tell others to come and see "a man who had told me all things I ever did" (v. 29). Beautiful and wonderful it is to see how admirably our Lord led the casual conversation with a stranger so as to introduce the profoundest spiritual truths.

My Christian friends, I know no art of social life more needful to be cultivated in our time and country than the art of skillfully introducing religion into general conversation. It is a difficult task. It requires tact and skill to do this in such a way as to accomplish much good and no harm, but it is worth all your efforts.

Not only did Jesus lead on towards religious truth, but he also knew how, in a quiet, skillful way, to awaken her consciousness to a realization of her sinfulness so that she might come near to spiritual truth. She shrank from the Lord

as people will often shrink from us when we try to bring truth home to their souls. She shrank, and, while not wishing to turn the conversation entirely away from religious things, she turned it to something not so uncomfortably close, and so she asked him about a great question much discussed: the proper place of worship.

She begins by saying, "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers did worship in this mountain," (vv. 19-20a) and right up the steep slopes of Mount Gerizim she could point to the mount high above them, where were the ruins of the old temple of the Samaritans, destroyed a century and a half before. She continues, "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain; and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. O prophet, which is it?" (v. 20). The Redeemer answers her question, but turns from all matters of form and outward service, and strikes to the spiritual heart of things. He replies, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming, when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall ye worship the Father" (v. 21). He does not fail to imply in passing that Jerusalem had been the right place. Tellingly, he concludes by asserting, "Ye worship that which ye know not. We worship that which we know, for salvation is from the Jews"—he only mentions that in passing—"but the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers" (vv. 22-23).

Jesus makes it clear that only spiritual worship will be acceptable to God. This is what he seeks, and, more than that, this is what the very nature of the case requires. "For God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." I wish to speak of the wor-

ship of God, and I shall ask two very simple questions about it, then try to some little extent to answer each of them. I ask: Why should we worship God? And how should we worship God?

Why Worship God?

A man might well draw back and fear to say one word as to reason why we should worship God. Oh! how high, and wide, and deep that theme! And yet it may be useful just to remind you of some things included in these expressions. Why ought we to worship God? Because it is due to him, and because it is good for us.

Worship is Due Him

We should render to God the worship due to him. My dear friends, if we were but unconcerned spectators of the Glorious God and his wonderful works our hearts still ought to be drawn to admiration and adoration and loving worship. The German philosopher Kant, probably the greatest philosopher of modern times, said, "There are two things that always awaken in me, when I contemplate them, the sentiment of the sublime. They are the starry heavens and the moral nature of man." God made them both, and all there is of the sublime in either or in both is but a dim, poor reflection of the glory of Him who made them. Whatever there is in this world that is suited to lift up men's souls ought to lift them towards God.

Robert Hall said that the idea of God subordinates to itself all that is great, borrows splendor from all that is fair, and sits enthroned on the riches of the universe. More than that is true. I repeat, all that exalts our souls ought to lift them up toward God. Especially ought we to adore the holiness of God.

Even sinful human beings know that

holiness is the crown of existence. There is not a human heart that does not somehow, sometimes, love goodness. Find me the most wicked man in all your great city, and there are times when that man admires goodness. Indeed, I imagine there are times when he hopes that somehow or other he may yet be good himself. When a man we love has died, we are prone to exaggerate in our funeral discourse and in our inscriptions on their tombstones. Exaggerate what? We seldom exaggerate much in speaking of a man's talents, or learning, or possessions, or influence, but we are always ready to exaggerate his goodness. We want to make the best of the man in that solemn hour. We feel that goodness is the great thing for a human being when he has gone out of our view into the world unseen.

And what do the Scriptures teach us is one of the great themes of the high worship of God, where worship is perfect? Long ago a prophet saw the Lord seated high on a throne in the temple, with flowing robes of majesty, and on either side adoring seraphs bending and worshipping. What was the theme of their worship? Was it God's power? Was it God's wisdom? You know what they said, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory" (Isa 6:3). And there do come times, my friends, to you and me, though we lift not holy hands, for we are sinful, though we dwell among a people of unclean lips, there come times when we want to adore the holiness of God.

Then think of his love and mercy! He hates sin. We know not how to hate sin as the holy God must hate it. Yet how he loves the sinner! How he yearns over the sinful! How he longs to save him! God so loved the world that he gave his only be-

gotten Son, that whosoever will have it so, might through him be saved (Jn 3:16).

I know where that great provision, that mighty mercy, is adored. I know from God's word that those high and glorious ones, who know far more than we do of the glorious attributes of the Creator and the wide wonders of his works, when they have sung their highest song of praise for God's character and for creation, will then strike a higher note as they sing the praises of redemption, for holiness and redemption are the great themes which the Scriptures make known to us of the worship in heaven. John saw in his vision how the four living creatures, representing the powers of nature, and the four and twenty elders, representing the saved of God, bowed in worship, and how a wide and encircling host of angels caught the sound, and how it spread wider still, until in all the universe it rolls, "Salvation and honor and glory and power be unto him that sitteth on the throne and unto the Lamb forever and ever" (Rev 7:10).

Holiness and redemption! We ought to adore it even if we had nothing to do with it, for we have a moral nature to appreciate it. But are we unconcerned spectators? That most wonderful manifestation of God's mercy and love has been made towards us. If the angels find their highest theme of praise in what the gracious God has done for us, how ought we to feel about it? Yes, there is a sense in which, amid the infirmities of earth, we can pay God a worship that the angels cannot themselves offer. Sinful beings may strike, out of grateful hearts for sins forgiven, a note of praise to God that shall pierce though all the high anthems of the skies and enter into the ear of the Lord God of Hosts.

Worship is Good for Us

But I said we ought to worship God, not only because it is due to Him, but because it is good for us. Only the worship of God can satisfy, my friends, the highest and noblest aspirations of our natures.

When anything lifts us up, our thoughts are imperfect without considering God. If you will look, as I looked this morning, in the early light, upon the glory of the autumn woods, faded now, yet still bright, and so beautiful; if you gaze upon the splendor, as you will do when this service is ended, of the night skies; if you stand in awe before the great mountains, snow-clad and towering, before Hermon, or before the wonderful mountains of our own wonderful West; if you go and gaze in the silence of the night upon the rush of your own imperial river, or stand by the seashore, and hear the mighty waters rolling evermore, then there swells in the breast something that wants God for its crown and for its completeness. There are aspirations in these strange natures of ours that only God can satisfy. Our thinking is a mutilated fragment without God, and our hearts can never rest unless they rest in God.

Worship also comforts. Indeed, sometimes worship alone can soothe our sorrows and our anxieties. There come times for all of us when everything else fails. There come times when we go to speak with sorrowing friends and feel that all other themes are weak and vain. You, wicked man yonder, you have gone sometimes to visit a friend in great distress, who had lost a dear child, it may be, or husband or wife. You sat down by your friend and wanted to say something comforting. You felt that everything else was vain but to point the poor sorrowing heart to God, and you felt ashamed of yourself that you

did not dare to do that. How often have devout hearts found comfort in sorrow, found support in anxiety, by the worship of God and by the thought of submission to God and trust in God. How comforting is the belief that God knows what he is doing, that God sees the end from the beginning, and that God makes "all things work together for good to those that love him" (Ro 8:28)!

I must add that the worship of God nourishes the deepest root of individual and social morality. Morality cannot live upon mere ideas of expediency and utility. We have some philosophers in our day (and they show abilities and earnestness that command our respect, though they may seem to us to go sadly and so far astray) who have persuaded themselves so. They think that Christianity must be flung aside and that belief in God must even be abandoned. What do they put in Christianity's place? Some answer that natural sympathy will lead us to recognize that we owe duties to others as well as ourselves. Natural sympathy is going to do that. Ah, I think not. Sometimes it will, if there be something mightier that can help, but often natural sympathy will fail.

The root of morality is the sentiment of moral obligation. What does it mean when your little child first begins to say, "I ought to do this," and, "I ought not to do that"? What does it mean, "I ought"? The beasts around us are some of them very intelligent. They seem to think in a crude fashion. They seem to reason in a rudimentary way. Our intellect is not peculiar to us. Animals have something of it, but they show no sign of possessing the rudiments of the notion that "I ought" and "I ought not." Such is the glory of man. It marks him in the image of the spiritual one that

made him. What will nourish and keep alive and make strong that sentiment of moral obligation in our souls, unless it be the recognition of the fact that there is a God who gave us this high, moral, spiritual being? That there is a God who made us for himself, to whom we belong, because he made us? Because he made us to love him, the sentiment of obligation to him must nourish in us the feeling of obligation to our fellow men, who, like us, are made in his image.

For this reason, if there were no other, it would be worthwhile to build great and noble churches in our great cities, just as we build monuments for other things to remind men of grand events and heroic deeds. Even if churches were never entered, they would be worth building as memorials, as reminders of God and eternity. Amid the homes of wealth and luxury, amid the splendid centers of commerce, and amid (alas!) the palaces of vice, our churches stand serene and still, pointing up, like the Christian's hope, toward heaven. Just as the thoughtless, the wayward, the worldly and wicked will sometimes look as they pass, and as from the monuments over some heroic dead man will catch a moment's impression for good, so from the church edifice itself they will catch a momentary impression of higher things, and be at least a little restrained from what is wrong and a little incited towards what is right.

But that is the least of it. The great nourisher of morality in the individual and the community is not the mere outward symbol; it is the worship that is paid within. But I shall say no more on this theme. All that I can say is weak, poor, and vain. How can a man tell the reasons why we should worship God? They are as high as heaven, as wide as the world,

and as vast as the universe.

How Should We Worship God?

The spiritual worship the text mentions is essentially independent of localities. Time was when it was not so, for once the best worship that was to be expected in the world depended upon holy places and impressive rites. In the childhood of the race these ideas were necessary, but Christianity came as the maturity of revealed religion, and declared that those ideas should prevail no longer. True Christian spiritual worship is essentially independent of localities.

My friends, under the Christian system you cannot make holy places; you cannot make a holy house. We speak very naturally and properly enough, if with due limitation, in the language of the Old Testament, about our places of worship, but we ought to remember constantly the limitations. You cannot consecrate a building in the light of Christianity. You can dedicate the building. You can set it apart to be used only for the worship of God. But you cannot make the house a holy house. Such is an idea foreign to the intense spirituality that Jesus has taught us belongs to the Christian idea of worship. Why then should we have houses of worship? Because they make it easier by force of association and of beneficent habit for us to have holy thoughts and to pay holy worship in the place where we have often paid it before. So we can see why it is fit to set apart places of worship, houses of worship for God, though they be not in themselves holy, though spiritual worship is independent of locality.

External Aids to Worship

Let us rise to a broader view of the matter. Spiritual worship must subordi-

nate all these externals. Listen a few minutes while I offer a plain, unadorned, unimpassioned statement about this really practical matter, for there are many extremes about it among men. Though you may not agree with my thought, it may help you to think the matter through for yourself.

I say, then, on the one hand, spiritual worship must have its externals. For while we are spiritual, we are something else also. We have a material nature, and we are all closely linked and interdependent upon each other continually. It is idle, then, to think that our worship will be all that it is capable of becoming if we try to keep it exclusively spiritual and give it no outward expression at all. When you try to pray in private by your own bedside, alone with your beating heart and your God, you mistake if you try to pray without couching your thought and feeling in words. We need the force of expression, though we utter not the words. We need to have the words in order to give clearness and form to our thought and our sentiment. So it is good, even when alone, to speak aloud one's private prayer, for that seems somehow, by a law of our nature, to make deeper the feeling that we thus outwardly express. If we do so even in private prayer, how much more is it necessarily true in public worship!

We must have expression for our worship, that there may be sympathy. We must use the language of imagination and passion as the Scriptures do. The Scriptures are full of the language of imagination and passion, language that is meant to stir the souls of men. When we sing we are striving to use that as one of the externals of spiritual worship. We need it. We must have externals.

Why, then, a man might ask, and men

often have asked, why not have anything and everything that will contribute at all to help the expression and cherish the devout feeling? Why not have everything in architecture, everything in painting and statuary, everything in special garments, in solemn processions, in significant posture? Why not anything and everything that may at all help as an external expression of devout feeling? Let us consider this, I pray you. I said spiritual worship must have its externals, and now I repeat that it must subordinate those externals. Whatever externals it cannot subordinate it must discard, and the externals it does employ it must employ heedfully. There are some things that awaken in some men a sort of fictitious, quasi-devout feeling, which you never would think of recommending as aids to devotion. Some persons when they use opium have a dreamy sort of devoutness, and some persons, even when they become drunk, show a morbid sort of religion. Yet who would think of saying that these are acts that help to devotion? But there are feelings that are right in themselves and noble in their place that do in some cases help to promote devotional feeling. The husband and wife, when they bow down with their children by their sides to pray together, and then, rising up, look lovingly into each other's eyes, find their devout feeling towards God heightened by their love for each other and their children. I can fancy that the young man and maiden who both fear God and have learned to love each other may sometimes feel their devout sentiments truly heightened by this new, strange, and beautiful affection which they have learned to feel for each other. That is so sometimes, and yet everybody sees that to recommend that as an avowed and systematic thing to be

used as a help to devotion would be out of the question. Not everything, then, that may promote devotion is to be regularly used for this purpose.

There are some things that look as if they were necessary, are very often recommended as helpful, and often employed as helps, that turn out to be dangerous and erroneous. Why can't we use pictures and statuary as helps to devotion? Why can't we employ them as proper means of making the thought of our Savior near and dear to us? Well, in all the ages of the world, the heathen have tried this. Some years ago, an educated young Hindu wrote an essay in which he complained bitterly that the Hindus were accused of worshipping images, and quoted Cowper's beautiful poem entitled, "My Mother's Picture": "O, that those lips had language! / Years have passed since thee I saw." He argued that the picture of the poet's mother brought close and made real the thought of one long dead. That is the way, he said, that we use images.

But that is not the way that the great mass of men use images in worship. They have often meant that at the outset. Yet how soon it degenerated and was degraded, and these things that were meant as helps to worship dragged down the aspirations of human hearts instead of lifting them up! But, it seems to me, if I were to employ such helps in our time, persuading myself that they would be good, then I should feel it was wise to go back to the old Ten Commandments that we teach our children to repeat and cut out the second commandment, which expressly forbids the use of graven images. You can inquire, if you are curious to do so, whether those Christians in our own time and country who employ pictures and statuary today as helps to devotion

have mutilated the Ten Commandments. The world has tried that experiment widely and in every way, and it is found that though you might think that pictures and statuary would be helps to devotion, they turn out to be hurtful. They may help a few; they harm many. They may do a little good; they do much evil.

There are some of these things which we must have to some extent: church buildings, architecture, music, cultivated eloquence. How about these? We are obliged to have these. But, my friends, they need to be used by us all with caution and with earnest efforts to make them helpful to devotion, or they will drag down our attention to themselves.

It is easy to talk nonsense on the subject of church music. It is very difficult to talk wisely. But I think we sometimes forget in our time that there is a distinction between secular and sacred music. I have seen places where they did not seem to know there was such a distinction. They seem to have obliterated the difference by using much purely secular music in sacred worship. It is a distinction not easy to define, I know, but easy enough to comprehend on the part of one who has an ear for music and a heart for devotion. It is a distinction that ought always to be heedfully regarded. Our beautiful church music I delight in. But we must learn to use it as a help to devotion, or it will do us harm. We must not only cultivate the use and enjoyment of artistic music for the sake of enjoyment, we must also cultivate the power of making it a help to religious worship. We must learn to do that, or we must refuse to have it.

We must learn to discard that which we cannot subordinate to spiritual worship. We must learn to use heedfully, with constant effort for ourselves, our families, and

our friends that which it is right to use, that it may help and not hinder. I pray you, then, do not go to asking people to come just to see your beautiful house of worship or to listen to your noble music. Some will come for that reason alone, and you cannot help it. But do not encourage such a thought. Talk about worship. Talk about these externals as helps to the solemn worship of God. Try to take that view of it. Try to make other people take that view of it. Be afraid for yourselves, and try to speak of it for its own sake and not for the sake of the aesthetic gratification it may give.

The Nature of Solemn, Internal Worship

And now, my brethren, can you listen a few moments longer to some closing words? I think that in most of our churches—our churches that have no set ritual, no fixed form of worship—there is a disposition to underrate the importance of public worship and to think only of the preaching. I notice that in those churches, not only our own, but those like it that have no special form of worship, they always give notice for preaching and not for worship. They only talk about the preacher and not the worship. They seem to think it makes little difference if they are too late for worship, provided they are there in time for the sermon. I notice that many preachers seem to give their whole thought to their sermon, and think nothing of preparing themselves for that high task, that solemn, responsible undertaking of trying to lift up the hearts of a great assembly in prayer to God. Wherever that may be true, let us consider whether we ought not to take more interest in our worship, in the reading of God's word for devotional impression, in solemn, sacred

song and in humble prayer to God, in which we wish the hearts of the whole assembly to rise and melt together.

It is true that we must take care how we cultivate variety here, for the hearts of men seem to take delight in some routine in their worship. They are rested if they know what comes next. They are harassed often if they are frequently disappointed and something quite unexpected comes in. We must keep our variety within limits, but within limits we must cultivate variety. I believe there should be more attention paid to making our worship varied in its interest than is usually the case.

Now, I say we must put heart in our worship. Do not venture to come to this beautiful place of worship, or whatever place of worship you attend, and just sit languidly down to see if the choir can stir you or to see if the preacher can stir you. Stir up your own souls. Such is your solemn duty to yourself, to others, to the pastor who wishes to lead your worship, and to God, who wants the hearts of men, and who will have nothing but their hearts. I know how we feel. Worn by a week's toil, languid on the Lord's day through lack of our customary excitement, we go and take our places, jaded and dull, and we are tempted to think, "Now I will see whether the services can make any impression on me; whether the preacher can get hold of me—I hope they may," and we sit passive to wait and see. Oh, let us not dare thus to deal with the solemnity of the worship of God.

My brethren, if we learn to worship aright, then there will be beautiful and blessed consequences. It will bring far more of good to our own souls. It will make worship far more impressive to our children. Haven't you observed that it is getting to be one of the questions of our

day how the Sunday School children are to be drawn to our public worship? We are often told that the preacher must try to make his sermon more attractive to children, and so he must. But let us also make our worship more impressive, and make our children feel that it is their duty to worship God, and try to bring them under the influence of this worship

If you have true, fervent worship of God, the stranger that comes into your place of worship will feel it too. Have you not noticed when you go into some houses how quickly you perceive that you are in an atmosphere of hospitality and genuine kindness? There may be no parade, no speech making. Yet in some places you may feel it. You feel it in the atmosphere and you feel it at once in your soul. You see a place where they are kindly and loving. So it ought to be that when a man comes into your place of worship he shall very soon feel something pervade the atmosphere he breathes. From the look of the people, from the solemn stillness, from the unaffected earnestness he shall feel that these people are genuine, solemn worshipers of God. When he feels that, he will conclude that God is with you and there will be power to move his soul in your solemn worship.

Conclusion

Now, my brethren, in this beautiful house that you have built for the worship of God, and are now dedicating to His worship, may there be much of real spiritual worship. When your hearts are full sometimes and you come and try to throw your souls into God's worship, may you be moved and melted. When you are sorely tempted sometimes and try to lift your heart to Him in prayer, may you get good from the wise and loving words of

the man you love to see stand before you as your pastor.

As your children grow up by your side and learn to delight with you in coming to the house of God, may you be permitted to see more and more of them gladly coming to tell what great things God has done for their souls, and gladly coming to put on Christ by baptism. And not only the children of your households, but strangers within your gates. How soon they will be pouring into this great city from the far East and the wonderful West, from all the North and all the South, and from beyond the sea! How they will, in these coming years, pour into this imperial, central city, with its vast possibilities that swell the souls of your businessmen, and that ought to swell the souls of your religious men. May the stranger within your gates learn here to love your Savior, rejoice here to proclaim that love, and rise from the liquid grave to walk in newness of life. Again and again, as you gather for that simplest of all ceremonies, as it is the most solemn, which Jesus himself appointed, in all simplicity taking bread and wine in remembrance of him, may he who sees men's hearts, see always that your hearts are towards him in godly sincerity. When offerings are asked here may they be offerings given as a part of the worship of God, offerings that come from your hearts, offerings that are accepted by him who wants the heart, offerings that are worthy of this beautiful home of your church life, and worthy to follow the gifts wherewith you have erected it. Time and again may there go forth those who have learned to worship here like successive swarms from fruitful hives to carry the same spirit of worship elsewhere, here and there, in great and growing needy cities.

Yes, and when the young of your households begin to link those households more closely than ever together, and on the bright bridal day the brilliant procession comes sweeping up the aisle and all men's hearts are glad, may they always come reverently in the fear of the God they have here learned to worship. And, mortal men and women, who have united to build high and glorious piles that will stand when you are gone, when in the hour of your departure from the works of your hands, and from the worship that you have loved on earth, and slow and solemn up the aisle they bear the casket that holds all that is left to earth of you, and behind some sad-faced men and sobbing women, and while the solemn music sounds through all these vaults and your pastor rises, struggling to control his own sorrow for the death of one he loved so well—may it be true, in that hour which is coming—may you begin from this night so to live that it shall then be true that the mourners of that hour may sorrow here, not as those who have no hope, and that the men and women who honor you, and have gathered to pay honor to your memory, may feel like saying in simple sincerity as they look upon your coffin, "The memory of the just is blessed; let me die the death of the righteous and let my last end be like his." Begin today, God help you to begin from this hour of entrance into your new place of worship so to live that all this may be true when you pass away.