

Worship

In Spirit and in Truth

Lesson #11 for September 10, 2011

Scriptures: Luke 1:46-55; 4:5-8; Deuteronomy 11:16; John 4:1-24; Luke 19:37-40.

1. This lesson focuses on what it means to worship “in spirit and in truth.” The Bible points out that we are not to worship other “gods.” But, why should God care about this little blue marble that we call Earth—the third rock from the sun? Considering the billions of galaxies and billions and billions of suns, stars, and worlds, why would God focus on us? It would have been so easy just to eliminate us. Why has God chosen to make this earth His future headquarters? At the worst possible site in the universe, God won the cosmic conflict.
2. Imagine the idea that the God who created the entire universe became a human being. (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16,17; Psalm 33:6,9) In effect, God has taken the worst of His universe and plans to make it into the best! What does that tell us about Him? What does that tell us about His attitude toward us?
3. One of the most important events in the history of the universe occurred when Jesus entered the womb of Mary. Did Jesus become a string of DNA? Was He able to condense Himself into a single sperm? What actually happened in the womb of Mary? Did God the Son, in effect, disappear for a period of nine months? Why did God choose to do it that way?
4. Our Roman Catholic friends believe that Mary was immaculately conceived. That is, they believe that Jesus was too holy to have been carried in the womb of a sinful woman. Therefore, Mary herself had to be sinless. When she was conceived by her parents, a miracle took place making her sinless. Why did they come up with such an idea? Where did that idea come from? Does it have something to do with Plato’s ideas of body and soul? Plato believed that all matter is evil while the spirit or soul is good. If Jesus is the ultimate good, how could He exist in the womb of a sinful woman?
5. How would our church or our Sabbath school class relate to an unmarried, pregnant teenager? Would we accept her? Would we believe her story? What did she say?
6. Read Luke 1:46-55. This “song of Mary” was spoken or composed at the time of her visit to Elizabeth who was pregnant with John the Baptist. Many of the ideas of that song came from Hannah’s song recorded in 1 Samuel 1:11; 2:1-10. As a child, did Mary memorize it because it was one of the very, very few passages in Scripture directly attributed to a woman? Was Mary actually happy to be pregnant before she was married?
7. What were the essential parts of her message? Despite the fact that she was, no doubt, despised and looked down on—even temporarily by her fiancé—she gave praise to God for what He had done for her. She was thankful for God’s mercy, for the fact that He scatters the proud, that He brings down kings but raises up the lowly and poor. The German philosopher, Nietzsche, considered such ideas as being completely opposite to reality. According to him, it is the proud and powerful that are rising on the evolutionary scale and not the poor and lowly. But, Mary praised God not only for what He is and had done for her, but also for what He had done for her people down through the ages.
8. Why do you think Mary was chosen to be the mother of Jesus? Didn’t every single Jewish woman hope that she would be chosen to be the mother of the Messiah? Mary was probably a teenager. Why was Joseph chosen to be His “father”? Joseph was already the

widowed father of at least six children and possibly eight or more. (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3) He must have been in his thirties. Did it have something to do with Galatians 4:4? Do we know anything about Mary's parents? How did they respond to this unexpected pregnancy? At first, were they incredulous? Did they believe Mary's story? Why do so many even among Christians disbelieve this story? No other religion has a story to match this one. Do we sometimes find the idea that God would come down and be born as a baby boy hard to believe?

9. Not much is said in the New Testament about Jesus worshiping. Did Jesus worship His Father in heaven? Was it appropriate for Jesus as both a human and a divine Being to worship His Father, God?
10. Read Luke 4:5-8. Why was Satan given so much freedom to carry Jesus around and try to manipulate Him? This passage describes a portion of the temptations which Christ faced after His 40 days of fasting in the wilderness. Why did God choose that fast? It could not have been for the purpose of placing Jesus in the way of temptation! Did that 40-day fast prepare Him for His ministry? Why did Matthew and Luke give different explanations for why Jesus went out into the wilderness? (Matthew 4:1; Mark 1:12,13; Luke 4:1; Different versions translate these verses somewhat differently.) Or did they?
11. Why did Satan want Jesus to bow down and worship him? Isn't that what Satan has always wanted? (Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 28) What would be wrong with worshiping Satan? If Jesus had bowed down to worship Satan, would it mean that He acknowledged him as God? Why do God and Jesus make it so clear that we are to worship no one except God? Is He jealous?
12. Read Deuteronomy 4:19. Did God, in fact, give the pagan world the sun, the moon, and the stars to worship? Was that fair? If you are not worshiping the true God, you will turn to worship something else.
13. In this series of lessons, we have suggested that we tend to become like what we worship. What do we worship? What do we consider of real value? Our homes? Our cars? Our bank accounts? Our retirement plans? If we had to choose between our retirement plan and Jesus Christ, which would we choose? Would we be willing to face our future without a penny to our name rather than give up Jesus Christ? (Revelation 13:16,17)
14. Do we do things that sometimes trivialize Jesus? Does the movie industry trivialize Jesus in their portrayals of Him? What do movies like *Jesus Christ, Superstar*—the rock opera play and later movie—say to us about Him?
15. Read John 4:1-24. Usually, Jews did not pass through Samaria on their way between Judah and Galilee. Do you think Jesus took His disciples through Samaria on this occasion just so He could have the encounter with that adulterous woman? What do we know about the Samaritan forms of worship? Do we sometimes engage in meaningless forms of worship? Why is it easier to engage in ritual, formula, and tradition than to truly worship God? Is it because ritual and formula do not require any thinking?
16. In that conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, He made an amazing disclosure. Read John 4:26. At the time of this story very early in His ministry, Jesus openly told that Samaritan woman that He was the Messiah and the "living-water" God on Earth. Why was He willing to say this to her when He almost never said any such thing to a Jewish audience? What happened when He tried to make that same claim before the Sanhedrin? (John 8:24,28,58) They tried to stone Him! Compare Exodus 3:14.
17. What did Jesus mean when He told the Samaritan woman that they worshiped something

they did not understand? Did the Jews truly understand what they were worshiping? Or, was the Jewish worship in Jesus' day just as corrupt as the Samaritan form of worship? What was Jesus trying to tell her about Mount Gerizim and even about Jerusalem?

18. What does it mean to worship "in spirit and in truth"? (John 4:23) What does it mean to worship God "in spirit"? Is that suggesting a very spirited kind of worship? Does "spirit" have to do with matters of the heart, even of the emotions? Does worshiping God in spirit mean that we are very sincere and feel deeply about what we are doing? Does it rule out all superficial forms of worship? If God is love, does that imply any kind of emotional response? We are called upon to love God. (1 John 5:2; Mark 12:30) Certainly, this must include some kind of emotion.
19. But more than this, God calls for us to worship Him "in truth." What does that imply? Do we know the truth about God? Do we know the truth about His character and His government? If we really know the truth about God, are we compelled to worship Him? (Philippians 2:10,11) Is it true that "to know Him is to love Him"? If so, what happened in the case of Lucifer/Satan?
20. Would it be correct to say that the better we know God and the more fully we understand the Scriptures and how God runs His universe and what He expects of us, the better quality our worship might exhibit? Surely, what we believe and know matters. Forms of worship which are primarily based on emotional responses leave out something very important in worshiping God. Would it also be correct to say that forms of worship which are entirely intellectual and leave out the emotional response are lacking something essential?
21. When we come to worship God, does our attitude really matter? When we come to God in worship, is it important that we think about what we are doing? Is worship supposed to be active? Or, only passive? Is it important to ask the right questions as we study?
22. Try to picture in your mind the child Jesus growing up in Nazareth and attending the synagogue every Sabbath. (Luke 4:16) At what age did He first begin to realize that there was a problem? At the age of 12, He asked many questions of the Jewish teachers in the temple. (Luke 2:41-50) By the time He was a teenager or young adult while He was still living in Nazareth, could He walk into the synagogue and sit down and worship without saying anything? Did He ask a lot of questions? What did the local people think about Him?
23. We know that Jesus was constantly speaking about His Father. Was that a kind of witnessing? Is witnessing a part of worship? Were the most important worship experiences in the life of the young Jesus the times when He went to the synagogue? Or, were the most important worship experiences those which occurred in the early mornings or late evenings when He was out in the fields communing with the angels and with His Father? Could we learn to worship in the same way that Jesus did? (*Desire of Ages* 70.3-70.4; *The Story of Jesus* 30.5-30.9)
24. Is spontaneity an important part of worship? Are spontaneous responses to God more genuine than more carefully planned responses? Would it ever be appropriate to have a Sabbath school period completely unplanned? Not much is said in the Gospels about Jesus actually worshiping. Was this intentional?
25. From the days of Jesus right through the history of Christianity to the present, there have been those who have believed that Jesus was not as fully God as is the Father. Most of them believe that at some point in the distant past, Christ was created. This view is often

called Arianism because one of the first Christians to advocate the view was Arius.

26. In the days of the Protestant Reformation, a young Protestant reformer arrived at Geneva which was then under the mayorship of John Calvin. That young man believed that Jesus was less than the Father. He would say, "Jesus is the son of the eternal God," but he would not say that "Jesus is the eternal Son of God." John Calvin and his city council condemned that young man to die in the flames because he did not agree with them. Will this young man be saved because of his faith in God? Or, will he be lost because of his Arianism? What about the treatment of Roger Williams in the early days of America?
27. Is it important to believe that Jesus was fully and completely divine? Is it important for us to believe that He was the Creator of the universe? If Jesus came to this earth to teach us about God but He was not completely God, have we been misled? In your way of thinking, is it truly essential for Jesus to be fully God? While here on this earth, did Jesus ever give evidence that He was God? (Matthew 2:11; 4:10; 9:18; 20:20; Mark 7:7; Luke 24:52; John 9:38) From these passages it is clear that Jesus stated unequivocally that only God should be worshiped. And yet, on many occasions He accepted worship from other human beings. What does that tell us about His own understanding of His divinity?
28. Read Mark 2:1-12. When the paralyzed man was let down through Peter's roof in front of Jesus, what did Jesus say to him? Why did the Pharisees standing around consider it to be blasphemous? Is it true that only God can forgive sins? (Compare James 5:16) In what sense did His healing of the paralytic prove that He could forgive sins? What was their idea about the cause of disease?
29. Read Luke 19:37-40. Considering what the Jews were hoping for in a coming Messiah, the triumphal entry was the high point of the life of Christ. They were certain that He was just about to be crowned king and would immediately set about to free them from Roman bondage. And they were shouting their praise and their excitement on that occasion. But, the Pharisees were very worried about the possibility that Jesus might become king. What would that do to their positions? What would it do to their theology? Why did Jesus say to them, "If they keep quiet, the stones themselves will start shouting"? How could rocks cry out?
30. Read John 13. Could you worship a God who gets down on His knees to wash dirty feet? What is implied by this pivotal experience in the life of Jesus? How did the disciples feel about this story when they looked back at it? Why did only John mention it?
31. Does true worship of God include obedience and service as well as dedication, conviction, and attendance at services? Are we prepared not only to give a few hours each week to the formal worship of Jesus Christ but also to serve Him during the rest of the week?
32. Those of us who accept and believe the great-controversy, trust, healing model of the plan of salvation believe that the truth about God, about His character, and about how He runs His government is our number one belief. How does this impact the way we worship Him? Is our worship more genuine, more meaningful, and more correct because of our beliefs?

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