



In Spirit and In Truth

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

Shortly before my father died in June of 2005 the age of ninety-one, he accepted Jesus Christ into his life. He spent his final days in a nursing home in Florida, and I was here in New York at the time, but I knew, even from that great distance, that his confession had been true. And so God honored me by allowing me to travel to Florida to preach the eulogy. We sent Dad on home with very few tears, because we were happy that after all that he'd been through and all that he'd done in his life, he was *saved*. And you know, when I think about my father, the one thing that I can say about him is that I never really saw him try to be anyone other than Otis Jackson. For all of his other faults, I don't believe that he had a phony bone in his body. And I guess that's why God liked him so much. Because he was *real*. Oh, he may have done some things that we didn't like, or approve of, or understand, but in the end, it came out that he wasn't really *evil*, or as even as mean as some people thought he was. He was just doing what he thought was right. And you have to respect that. I never saw him put on airs, or “front” for anybody, or jump on anybody's bandwagon, or try to be something that he wasn't, or go out of his way to impress anybody. With dad, what you saw really *was* what you got. He was *himself*, and if you didn't like it, that was just too darn bad. But I really do think that God liked him.

He wasn't very *religious*, and I think that that was probably another reason why God liked him. Oh, I'm sure that He didn't like a lot of Dad's *ways*, but at the very end, He showed us all that he liked the man himself.

Why? Well, if you look at the gospel of John, chapter four, verse twenty-four, you will find Jesus saying this about God the Father, “God is a Spirit: and they that

worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." This passage of scripture indicates, more than anything, the fact that God loves authenticity. As I said before, if there was anything that my dad wasn't, it was phony. And that, to me, explains why, after ninety-one years of living on this earth, and after all that hell that Dad had raised, and after all the people, including myself who'd been offended by his ways, and swore that he would *never* get into heaven, God made sure that my father made it into His presence to hear Him say "well done." And now, a man whom I had avoided, and sometimes despised, and who had definitely caused me to carry around a lot of hurt as a result of some of the things that he'd said to me and did to me, is seated among that "great cloud of witnesses," that hall of faith (no, you won't see him in Hebrews 11, but he's in there), that gathering around the throne of those who "believed God, and it was counted unto them for righteousness." That makes him a *hero*, and that is what he is to me. He never threw a football to me. He didn't show up to see me run track. He didn't come to hear me sing, or to see me graduate from Basic Training, or receive my college degree, or get married, or get promoted in the Army, or become an ordained minister, or have my first child, or preach the Gospel, but all the same, he was, and he is my hero.

Because he was *real*. And because in the end, he believed God. And again, I say, I believe that God let it be that way because He liked my dad. Because he was real. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." The one thing that we have to know about God is that He cannot be manipulated. He can't be conned, so we might as well quit trying. He sees *everything*. He knows *everything*. The greatest thing about the Holy Ghost being the Spirit of truth is that He's *everywhere*. We live in a world full of fakery; full of illusions, but truth cannot be hidden, no matter how much we try to cover it up. We try to fix it up in a whole lot of ways, and drown it out, but it's always showing up, sometimes when we least expect it to, or want it to. The truth is always speaking. That's because *God* is always speaking to us, always warning us, always calling us, always trying to get us to mend our ways and turn to Him, to stop living in the self-imposed bondage of constantly trying to convince ourselves, and others, and ultimately *Him*, that we are something that we're not.

The scripture that I have used as a backdrop for this discussion came out of a conversation that Jesus was having with a woman at a well. I won't get into the details here, because most of us know the story well enough, but the important thing is that when this woman had an encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ, she found out that she wasn't all that after all. I mean, she got *stripped*. Jesus not only got into her business, but He revealed to her the truth about herself in such a galvanizing and dramatic way that He set her on the road to her true destiny.

She had spent her whole life going from one man's arms to the next, not knowing that God had ordained, from the foundation of the world that she was going

to be one of the first preachers of the Gospel. And this woman *preached*, I tell you. She preached until a whole *city* got saved. You can say what you want to, but I'll bet you that that old girl was so happy, so ecstatic to have found out that she wasn't nobody's "ho," that she wasn't no hoochie-mama, and wasn't no man *ever* gonna put his hands on her again, when she found out that she was a princess, and a royal priest, and a child of the King, I'll bet that she preached at the top of her lungs so *everybody* could hear her. She probably out-"whooped" and out- "say yeahed" the best of the black (and white) preachers. And it's very important that we note here that she did *not* say, "Come to church." She did not say "come on over to Bedside Baptist, where the feast of the *Lawd* is goin' on!" No, she said, "Come see a Man!" So don't you *dare* tell me that "God ain't called no woman to preach," because He called *that* one. And He will use anyone, male or female, young or old, who, when confronted by the Spirit of Truth, will accept Him, embrace Him, and allow Him to transform them into the image of Christ.

And that's all God really wants to do. Deliver us from our phoniness. It's hard to be yourself when you don't know who you really are. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Like the woman at the well, we devise our own ways of dealing with God, and then we get mad when he doesn't accept them. But our approaching Him *has* to be in spirit, and it *has* to be in truth. Why? Because firstly, "*they that are in the flesh cannot please God.*" (Romans 8:8).

It is hard, no, impossible to be in the flesh and in the spirit at the same time. Oh, we try to do that, but the fact is, flesh is flesh and spirit is spirit. One thing that the woman at the well did that got her into trouble is that she got into an argument with *God* about how and where to worship God. And let's not look at her funny, 'cause we do that, too. The flesh is mostly concerned with external things, how stuff looks from the outside. We think that if we dress it up well enough that God's going to take it, and then we look down on those who can't fix it up as well as we can. She thought that her being a Samaritan in Samaria meant that she had it going on, so she started boasting about the fact that Mt. Gerizim was the sacred spot where the Samaritans worshiped. She was bragging about her *church*. Conversely, Jesus, being a Jew, knew that the Jews looked down on the Samaritans because they were descended from Jews who, when Israel had been conquered by the Assyrians, had mixed with their conquerors, and therefore were no longer quote-unquote, "the people of God." Jesus had to show her that both races had it all mixed up, and that the important thing is not what mountain you worship on, or what church you go to, or who your daddy was, but whether or not your heart is right with God. And that's why, when she left His presence, the only thing that she could say was, "come see a man!" Never mind all that other stuff, but "come see a man!" Never mind who your bishop is, or what your denomination is, or whether or not you have on a suit, or a tie, or a fancy hat, "come see a man!" Be you an illiterate, or a PhD, "come see a man!" The

bottom line is that if we're *ever* going to be right with God, we've got to be willing to throw everything aside, and "come see a Man."

For He is "the way, the truth, and the life," and no man cometh to the Father, no man, no matter who they may be in this world, or what may be their station in life, no man can approach the Father, except they "come see a man!" That is, *the Man*, Jesus Christ. Then and only then can we transcend the flesh, and move into the realm of the spirit. Until then, we can sing until we're all blue in the face. We can build all of the great buildings we want to build. We can raise up a million more denominations, and give ourselves a million more titles, the fact remains that flesh is flesh and spirit is spirit, and "*they that worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth.*"

The second reason that Jesus said what he said is that *God is truth*, and therefore the basis of our approach to him must be rooted in truth. Jesus says that the devil "is a liar, and the father of lies, and consequently, when we try to come to God on any other basis than who we truly are and who He truly is, then we operate in falsehood, which puts us in league with the devil. The point, though, is not that this makes us evil. The point is that it *locks us out* of the presence of God. I once heard someone ask, "Why can't satan be saved?" The devil can't be saved because God is truth, and everything that the devil is is a lie, and therefore he has no access to truth, he has no membership card, because there is no truth in him. Even if he had it in him to try, he can't get in. And that is why worship is so important. When we worship God in spirit and in truth, we are actually going to a place where the devil can't follow. He can't harm you, because he can't *find* you. The Bible says that "*he that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.*"

Worship causes you to be *hidden* in God. And the devil gets confused, because now you're in spirit, and now you're in truth, and he's *lost your scent*. But whenever we live in such a way that our lifestyle agrees with satan, then we put ourselves in the same position that he is in, and although what we're doing might *feel* good, it separates us from God. It might look good. Men may applaud us for it. It might even help some people, but if it's not done with a true heart, if it's not done with God's purposes in mind, if it's not done in accordance with the *will* of God, as He has expressed it in His Word, God cannot, He *cannot* accept it. That's why we have to be careful even doing good things because it is possible to do a right thing for the wrong reason. You see, God knows the *real* reason why you bought old Miss Jones some groceries. You wanted to be seen as a wonderful person. That's why you got on the phone and told *everybody* what you did. God knows the *real* reason why you sing in the choir. You figure that if you sing loud enough, and hard enough, one of the sisters will pay attention to you. What's up with *that*? You're not worshiping God; you're looking for a girlfriend. We deal with things based on the *what*, but God deals with the *why*. To us, if a thing *looks* good, then it *is* good. But God is looking at our *motives*.

Oh, that God would deliver us from ourselves! Oh that we would experience what the prophet Isaiah did when King Uzziah, his last link to the pretense of this world, was snatched away from him and he finally saw God for who He is! That's why we've got to learn to be real with God- because when we get into His presence, He can show us our *real* selves!

Not so that He can condemn us, but so that He can *save* us. I used to wonder why people ride around these days with the music in their automobiles blasting so loud that the whole frame of the car shakes- boom, boom-boom boom-BOOM! "That's so they can't hear *me*," God said to me. That's why it's so hard for some people to walk alone. They surround themselves with people- homeboys, homegirls, entourages, gangs and 'possies' so that they don't have to face themselves. That's so they can't cry out, like Isaiah: "Woe is me!" *"But if our gospel be hid, the Bible says, "it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."* (2 Cor. 4:3-4)

The devil does not *want* us to know the truth. About ourselves, about him, and definitely not about God. Because he knows what comes next: redemption, cleansing, consecration, commissioning. *"Create in me a clean heart, O God;"* David cries, *"and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee."* (Psalm 51:10-13). You see, when I see God for real, when I, like the woman at the well, have a real encounter with Jesus, not religion, not policy and procedure, not singing on Sunday morning, so that I can sin on Sunday night, but *Jesus*, then I'll find out just how broken I really am. Then I'll cry out, like Isaiah, did, like David did, for God to fix me. Then, and only then, can He send me out to help someone else get fixed. The flesh, the world, the devil, and to some extent, ourselves want to keep us fake, keep us phony, because the last thing this world wants is a whole bunch of changed people running out into the streets crying out, "come see a man!" So they'll help us to stay phony, keep us thinking that our religion, and our good deeds done in our own strength, and in our own time, and in our own way are really getting us in with God. Oh, that we might learn that *"by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."* Oh, that we might learn that *"all our righteousness is as filthy rags..."*

Romans 3:21 tells us this: *"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested..."* What that means is that God, through Jesus Christ, has provided a way, in which we can come to God, and honestly and truly present our case before Him, and be granted a righteousness which is not our own, one that we can in no way even hope to earn. The most profound thing that a human being can say to God is, *"I can't do this!"* That's when Jesus steps in, and says, *"I already have."* That's when you say,

"Just as I am, without one plea..." "I won't even speak for myself. I won't make excuses anymore. Here I am, Lord! Every lie, every deception, every shortcoming. Every sinful act, and even the religious things that I've done to try to cover them up. *Nothing in my hand I bring...*" That is when we find that it has all been nailed to the Cross. That is when we become those who die with Christ, and are raised with Christ to live in newness of life. That is when we become those who can truly worship God, live for God, serve God, in spirit and in truth.