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**Matthew 4:7-10, ESV.**

*<sup>8</sup>Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. <sup>9</sup>And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." <sup>10</sup>Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written,*

*" 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.' "*

**And him only.**

We're all familiar with the story of Jesus, when he goes into the desert and confronts Satan. Jesus submits to something very human: temptation. Before he begins the heart of his ministry, he is allowing himself to feel as we do. He was God and he has become a man, and in the desert, repeatedly, Satan appeals to the man within Jesus. At one point, we are told this:

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If Jesus will only worship Satan, Jesus would somehow be given all the kingdoms of the world. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy when he declares that only God should

be worshipped. We should remember that the telling of this incident in the desert begins with: “**4** Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” Jesus does not answer a call from Satan. Jesus does not decide on his own to enter the desert. He is led by the Holy Spirit, and this tells us that Jesus feels God calling him to undergo a great test that all of us must undergo in life. Will we worship God, or will we desire the things of this world so much that we are willing to worship Satan to get them? But notice that Jesus then quotes Moses as Moses is reminding the Chosen People of their responsibilities to God before entering the land of Canaan. They are to remain faithful to their God. They are not to worship any other God – and certainly not Satan, Jesus is saying. But what does it mean to “worship” *the Lord your God*?

The Greek word that is translated as “worship” is “*Proskuneo*”. There are 59 uses of this word in the New Testament. There are other words that in some English Bibles are translated as “worship”, but these words tend to more precisely mean “to minister to”, “to serve”, or the noun “religious service”. This word, “*Thraskeia*” is something we should note for later in my message. It is used in Acts Chapter 26 to refer to Jewish services. Paul is speaking to a Roman official named Agrippa. Paul is defending himself against charges made by Jewish religious officials, saying that he, Paul, is a Jew himself, that he knows Jewish law

and does not break it. Paul is saying that he has taken part in very strict religious practices as a Pharisee. In this context, he is referring to the way Jews, and the class of Pharisees in particular, worship God and follow God's law. I'll come back to this word "*Thraskeia*". For now, we focus on "*Proskuneo*", which is used many times to refer to worshipping God. Let's look at another use of this word, from the Gospel of John Chapter 4, where Jesus greets a Samaritan woman at a well. He approaches her, asking her if she will draw him a drink of water. The Samaritans were thought to have perverted the Jewish faith. It was believed that the Assyrians, when they captured Jews after invading the land of Israel, imported Samaritans to repopulate the land. These people were monotheists who used a version of the Torah as their holy book, but Jews believed that they had polluted the Jewish faith with pagan beliefs. Thus, Jews shunned them. But there is Jesus, drinking water handed to him by a Samaritan woman. He treats her with respect, and she accepts him as the Messiah. Here is the quote:

*"Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. <sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." <sup>25</sup> The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." <sup>26</sup> Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."*

Notice that Jesus is telling her that indeed her faith is misdirected. He is telling her that God's covenant is with the Jews, not the Samaritans. He tells her that true worshippers must worship the proper God the Father. And he is telling her the right way to have a relationship with God – and that is through him.

Let's look at a passage from Revelation, Chapter 14. We are being told that true worshippers have the name of God on their foreheads, not the name of the Beast, the antichrist:

*<sup>6</sup> Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. <sup>7</sup> And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."*

We are being told to worship the being who made heaven and earth, and all of existence, and this is, of course, God.

Consider the very last passage in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus has been crucified. He has risen from the dead. He has met with various people, including the Apostles. Now he ascends into Heaven:

*<sup>50</sup> And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. <sup>51</sup> While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. <sup>52</sup> And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, <sup>53</sup> and were continually in the temple blessing God.*

Jesus is with his Apostles. He blesses them. He is lifted into Heaven. They worship him and return joyously to Jerusalem.

Let's get back to this question of what it means to "worship" God. When we come to church each Sunday, the primary thing we do is worship God. In 1 Corinthians, Chapters 12 to 14, Paul says that when we worship God, we express this in a wide variety of ways. Indeed, on one hand, worshipping refers to a group action, the rituals we perform, the prayers we say, and the songs we sing to reaffirm our devotion to God, our trust in God, and our determination to always live by God's law. As Christians, this focuses on Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah. We don't express our faith by sacrificing oxen on the altar. We don't kneel before idols. Our God is everywhere, not inside some statue or image. We may have representations of God, of Jesus, in our church, but we are not worshipping these representations themselves. Importantly, in Christianity, we link worship of God very strongly to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. In Romans Chapter 8, Paul declares that it is the Holy Spirit that leads us to God, to worship God in everything we do by walking hand in hand with Jesus:

*<sup>12</sup> So then, brothers and sisters, we are obligated, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—<sup>13</sup> for if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" <sup>16</sup> it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if we in fact suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.*

He further establishes the power of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians, 12:

<sup>3</sup> *Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.*

In sum, when we come together to worship God, we are inspired by the Holy Spirit to use multiple means, including prayer, song, Scripture readings, communion, even candle lighting to declare that through Jesus, we have a bond, a personal relationship with God. We promise to honor our God and to live according to God's laws. We thank our God for what we have, and we declare our dedication to the principles that Jesus taught us by his words and actions, and this includes love and forgiveness to those around us. Interestingly, the literal translation of "*Proskuneo*", our New Testament Greek word for worship, is to kiss or to hold in reverence. But it is accurately translated as our English word "worship", and like our word in English, it has both a noun and a verb form.

But let's go back to that other word, "*Thraskeia*". It really means "religious service". Here is the point I am trying to make. We don't want to confuse the process of worshipping God with participating in a worship service. The first thing, even if we do it in a group, is a personal, individual thing. The second is a shared, public experience. I'm not saying that one is more genuine than the other. My goal is help us refine our notion of worship. The early Christian churches were probably modeled after the synagogue system of Jerusalem, but

we know so little about ancient synagogue worship practices, that we cannot be sure of the depth of this influence. Regardless, while there have been Christian church services since the very early days of the faith, when we read the New Testament, the focus is usually on the personal nature of worship – even when it is carried out in a group. Please listen as I summarize the passages that we have looked at so far. From Jesus quoting Moses to Satan, *‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve,’* to Jesus speaking to the Samaritan woman, *‘true worshipers will worship the Father,’* to John of Patmos quoting an angel, *‘Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water,’* to the Gospel writer describing the reaction of those witnessing the ascension, *‘And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy,’* to Paul telling us about the role of the Holy Spirit in worship, *‘if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live,’* all of these passages focus on the state of mind and the responsibilities of the individual, not the collective nature of worshipping. When these passages talk about worship, they talk about something personal. We may worship as a group, but we live worship as individuals within a group.

I’d like you to consider the incredible opportunity that comes with a Sunday service. It’s more than a group ritual. It’s more than a way to receive support

from fellow believers. Attending a worship service is a very personal thing, and many Christians have forgotten this. Take the opportunity to focus on yourself while you are in church – and think about your own relationship with God. You may be worshipping in a group, but you are the one who is worshipping.

One Sunday, when I was a boy in church, there was a woman sitting in front of our family. She was probably middle aged. She was there with her husband and her kids, who were a bit older than me, maybe teenagers. As you might be aware, during traditional Catholic services, there is a certain amount of kneeling, standing, sitting, kneeling, that sort of thing, as the ritual of the Mass unfolds. It was important, I had been taught at school, to pay attention and to do what you were supposed to do, always matching the motions of the rest of the congregation. But at one point when everyone had been kneeling and then we all sat down, she didn't. She remained kneeling, her head bowed, her hands folded on the back of the pew in front of her. She stayed that way for the rest of the service. As people sang and prayed in unison, she remained unmoving. Her family didn't seem to pay any attention to this. Near the end, I leaned over and whispered to my father, asking if this lady was okay. He whispered back, *"Yes, of course: she just happens to be doing what we're all supposed to be doing."* Indeed, as we left our pew, her family remained there, sitting, waiting for this



woman to finish. I knew what my father meant, of course. She was praying, kneeling before the Lord. At some point, her worshipping just didn't happen to fit well with the flow of the service. Later, as we stood outside in the bright morning sun, I saw her come out of the church surrounded by her husband and kids. She was beaming, a big smile on her face. While her husband and kids chatted with each other, she just walked along with them, silent, not looking at anyone, and still reveling in the joy of coming to church and truly worshipping God.

Remember that you are here because you're on a life-long journey to develop a deep and genuine relationship with God, something that you feel, not just now, but this afternoon, this evening, when you wake up tomorrow, and every day, until you are here again. Make church a personal experience. Here is my suggestion on how to do it. Don't put pressure on yourself to somehow have a surreal, glorious, otherworldly experience during the service. Just relax. Be low key. Use this as a time of reflection. Make church a calming experience. Turn the prayers and the songs into something personal. Think about the words of the prayer, the song, and what they mean to you. You are the one talking to God, independently of everyone else - don't forget that. Make it your goal simply to leave here with a sense of peace. I think that if you seek tranquility, over the course of multiple weeks, collective worship will become an opportunity to

ground yourself, to reset for the week ahead. And, over time, I believe you will feel the Holy Spirit inspiring you to truly worship God. I never know how much what I have to say each Sunday connects with any individual, how meaningful it is to each of you. My hope is that somewhere in what I say, you can find something that's your own, that is personal – because that is what church is: a personal experience in public place. My biggest joy would be if each of you could eventually discover that on Saturday night when you are falling asleep, you're looking forward to the vibrant experience you will feel in the morning, after you have walked into this church. Worship is more than a shared social experience: it is your opportunity to smile at the glory of God gazing down upon you as God listens to you personally. Please pray with me.

*God, we thank you for this church, for this faith community, for the gift of being able to come here once a week and to express our collective trust in you. We thank you for the bonds that hold us together – holy bonds that are as strong as the bonds of a nuclear family. We thank you for the ability to draw strength from the social connections provided by this church. But God, we also ask you to make each Sunday morning in this building a personal experience, one that refreshes our individual souls and brings the specific sort of comfort that each of us needs. Amen.*