

In Spirit and in Truth



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 3

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Deuteronomy 11:16; Luke 1:46–55; Luke 4:5–8; Luke 19:37–40; John 4:1–24.

MEMORY VERSE: “But a new time is coming. In fact, it is already here. True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. They are the kind of worshipers the Father is looking for” (John 4:23, NlrV).

AS WE HAVE LEARNED ALL QUARTER, THE FIRST ANGEL'S MESSAGE OF REVELATION 14 IS A CALL TO PREACH THE “EVERLASTING GOSPEL.” At the center of that gospel is Jesus, the God-man. He is the God who came into this world as a human. Our minds cannot even begin to understand this mystery.

But try to think through what this means. Jesus is the God who created all that was created (John 1:1–3). He became a human. And in human form He lived a sinless life. And then He offered Himself as a Sacrifice for the sins of all people. Think of the size of the universe. There are billions of galaxies,¹ and each galaxy holds billions of stars. Can you believe that Jesus created all of this? It is beyond the human mind to understand this. It is something so wonderful that we can never understand it fully. No wonder Paul wrote, “The message of the cross seems foolish to those who are lost and dying. But it is God's power to us who are being saved” (1 Corinthians 1:18, NlrV).

With a truth like this before us, it is no surprise that we want to worship such a God. This week we will study themes of worship and praise as shown in the ministry (work) of Christ as a human on earth. He is the Creator who accepted the form and the flesh of the people He has created.

1. galaxies—huge groups of stars.

SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 4**MARY'S SONG OF PRAISE AND WORSHIP (Luke 1:46–55)**

Mary, the mother of Jesus, has been the subject of much religious discussion through many hundreds of years. But most of that discussion is not based on the Bible.

However, in the question of Christ's coming to earth, Mary played a very important part. In her womb was the Savior of the world who was born by a miracle. In her womb He grew into the Infant Jesus. Looking back with all the light given us in the New Testament, we only can marvel at the miracle. Mary knew that she was part of a miraculous event that was to have important results for her people. But the young Mary had no real idea of just how big that event would be. However, she knew enough that she could partly understand the wonderful results that had changed her life so much.



In Mary's womb was the Savior of the world.

Read Luke 1:46–55, often known as the Song of Mary. What is the background to this song? Why is Mary singing it? What parts of praise and worship are shown here? What appears here that we have touched on all through the quarter?

This song of praise and worship is filled with ideas and word-pictures taken from the Old Testament. The Old Testament is the only Bible that Mary would have known. Here we find that she is giving glory (praise and honor) to the Lord. She is also giving praise for God's leading in her own life and in her people's lives too. Her mention of Abraham is pointing to the covenant² that the Lord made with His people. Mary is praising God for His promises to them. Those promises give her hope. And those promises give her people hope for the future.

Again, Mary really did not understand everything about the miraculous Baby she carried inside her. But she knew enough to know it was the working of the Lord. For that, she was thankful and worshipful.

How much of the miracle do you find in your own life? Or are you just too hard, too closed, too wrapped up in yourself to understand it as you should?

MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 5**WORSHIP AND SERVE (Luke 4:5–8)**

After 40 full days of fasting, hunger,

2. covenant—promise and agreement between God and His people.

weariness (being tired), and suffering, Jesus was now facing the open temptations of the devil. It is not hard to imagine just how beautiful all “the kingdoms of the world” in their “power” and their “glory” must have appeared to Jesus in this temptation. (Read Luke 4:5–8.) Satan has been a master at making the things of this world seem pleasant and attractive. This is why people so quickly fall for the temptations that this world presents.



After 40 days of fasting, Jesus faced Satan’s temptations.

What does Jesus mean by connecting the verbs “worship” and “serve” in Luke 4:5–8? How are they related?

All through the Old Testament, the idea of worshiping false gods and serving them is connected. (Read Deuteronomy 4:19; read also Deuteronomy 11:16; Psalm 97:7; and Daniel 3:12.) You serve what you worship. How important it is that you worship only the Lord!

This brings us to a very important point about worship. It is hard to

imagine someone who truly worships the Lord in faith, in surrender, in love, and in fear while also serving false “gods” at the same time. Worship can protect us against idol worship. The more we worship the Lord, the better protected we are against serving self, sin, and all the other evil forces.

Think about this idea more: what we worship is what we serve. How have you experienced that principle in your own life? How can your worship experience help you to stay focused on serving only the Lord?



True worship can shield us from idol worship.

TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 6

WORSHIPING WHAT YOU KNOW NOT (John 4:1–24)

It was not the practices of worship alone that the Lord cared about. The services and practices were just tools to reach a goal. That goal was a person surrendered in body and mind to his or her Creator and Savior. But it is much

easier to make one's religion a series of services, customs, and outward acts than it is to daily die to self and surrender in faith to the Lord. This fact explains why the Bible spends a lot of time dealing with those whose hearts are not right with God, no matter how "correct" their worship services are.

This, too, was a problem that Jesus had to deal with when He was on earth.

What important point about worship was Jesus making to the Samaritan woman in John 4:21? Why was He pointing her away from earthly places of worship?

Jesus got the woman's attention by pointing out some of her deepest secrets. He then used that moment to point her to something better than what she had. Jesus uses the powerful phrase "Woman, believe me" to show her that true worship is far more important than just practices and places of worship. "This mountain" was Mount Gerizim, where the Samaritans had built a temple.

But Jesus did not stop there. He included even Jerusalem, the place of the holy temple that He, Himself, had picked. So, early on in His earthly ministry, Jesus was pointing to what He later came right out and said about the temple: " 'Not one stone here will be left on top of another. Every stone will be thrown down' " (Matthew 24:2, NIV). In all this, Jesus was working to give the woman the "living water" (John 4:10), which is Himself. He wanted the

woman to know that a personal relationship with her Creator and Savior was the true foundation of worship. And certainly it was not the services and practices of her faith. This is because her religion had strayed from the true religion of the Jews. Jesus' example of Jerusalem (John 4:21) proved that He was pointing to something more important than sacrifice and worship that He Himself had created.

In what ways can all the parts of your worship experience help you to make your relationship with God go deeper?

WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 7

THE TRUE WORSHIPERS (John 4:28)

Jesus points the Samaritan woman away from earthly places of worship and then tells her that the Jewish faith is truer than hers. Then Jesus tells the woman about "the true worshipers." In verse 21, Jesus says that the hour (time) "is coming" when people will not worship either on that mountain (Mount Gerizim) or in Jerusalem. But in verse 23, Jesus says that the hour "now is" that all true worshipers will worship in spirit and in truth. In other words, do not look to some past glory. And do not depend on some future event. Rather, the time "now is" to give the Lord the worship He deserves. And through that worship experience the people can expect the love, the grace,³ and the salvation that He offers.

3. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us in order to take away our sins.

Jesus said that all true worshipers will “worship the Father in spirit and in truth.” What does this mean? And how are we to use this truth in our worship experience today? Read also Mark 7:6–9.

Here Jesus is calling for a balanced kind of worship. It is the kind of worship that comes from a sincere heart and the love and the fear of God. There is nothing wrong with emotion (deep feeling) in worship. After all, our religion calls us to love God (1 John 5:2; Mark 12:30). And so how can the love for God be separated from emotions?

At the same time, God calls His true worshipers to worship Him “in truth.” God has shown His will, His law, His truth—truth that we are expected to believe and obey. True worshipers will love God. From that love they will work hard to serve Him, obey Him, and do what is right. But how can they know what is right without knowing the truth about faith, obedience, salvation, and so forth? The idea that beliefs are not important and that only a sincere spirit is important is false. It is only half of the story. Correct beliefs do not save, but they will give us a great understanding of the character⁴ of God. And that should make us love and serve Him all the more.

Is your worship more spirit than truth or more truth than spirit? How can you learn to join together

and balance both of these parts of worship?



Jesus calls for a perfect balance in worship between loving Him and obeying His truth (law).

THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 8

WORSHIPING AT HIS FEET (Matthew 2:11)

Over the long years of Christian history, the church has been divided over the issue of the nature of Christ⁵ as God. Was He truly the eternal God, one with the Father from the beginning? Or was He created later, a person who was created into life by the Father?

Early in our own church history, there was some confusion on this matter. But Ellen G. White made it very clear years ago what her position was. It was the position that, as a church, we have fully accepted today:

“‘His name shall be called Immanuel [God with us].’ ‘The light of the knowl-

4. character (of God)—who God is, having and understanding the character of God is the same as being kind, loving, honest, and so on. God’s law (Ten Commandments) shows us His character.

5. nature of Christ—any of the qualities or aspects of God that make Him who He is, such as His love, mercy, goodness, forgiveness, holiness, power, and so on.

edge of the glory of God' is seen 'in the face of Jesus Christ.' From the beginning the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father. He was 'the image [person] of God.' He was the image of God's greatness and majesty. He was 'the outshining of His glory.'⁶ It was to show this glory that He came to our world. To this sin-darkened earth He came to show the light of God's love—to be 'God with us.' So that is why the prophets⁷ foretold that 'His name shall be called Immanuel [God with us].'⁷ —Adapted from *The Desire of Ages*, page 19.

What do Matthew 2:11; Matthew 4:10; Matthew 9:18; Matthew 20:20; Mark 7:7; Luke 24:52; and John 9:38 tell us about Jesus as God?

Jesus was very clear in His answer to Satan (Matthew 4:10) that the Lord alone should be worshiped. This leads to the important point shown in the verses above: Christ never refused worship. No example is given in the many times when people worshiped Jesus where He told them, Do not worship me. Point your worship only toward the Father. In fact, Jesus allowed people to worship Him.

What does Jesus' answer in Luke 19:37–40 to the Pharisees tell us about His attitude (feeling) toward those who worshiped Him?

The point here is to repeat a theme studied all this quarter: how impor-

tant it is to make Jesus the center and focus of all our worship. Every song, every prayer, every sermon, everything that we do should direct our minds toward Christ. He is the God-man who offered Himself as the sacrifice for our sins. Worship that leaves us with a sense of awe, love, and deep respect for our Lord is worship that is pleasing to Jesus.

FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 9

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, "God With Us," pages 19–26, in *The Desire of Ages*.

"Not by looking for a holy mountain or for a holy temple are men brought into close relationship with heaven. Religion is not to be limited to outside services and practices. The religion that comes from God is the only religion that will lead to God. In order to serve Him in the right way, we must be born of the Holy Spirit. This will make the heart pure and renew the mind. This will give us a new ability to know and love God. It will give us willing obedience to all His requirements [laws]. This is true worship. It is the fruit of the working of the Holy Spirit."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 189; emphasis (special attention) added.

"Jesus is equal with God. Yet, He acted as servant to His disciples [followers]. . . . Every knee shall bow to Him. All the angels of glory count it honor to serve Him. And yet, wonder

6. glory—great beauty, power, and royal perfection.

7. prophets—men or women who are spokespersons for God. God gives His prophets special messages to give to His people.

of wonders, He bowed down to wash the feet of those who called Him Lord!”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 649.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ The religious leaders of Christ’s day claimed to know the Bible. But they could not understand the greatest miracle in history, the birth of the Messiah (Chosen One). Meanwhile, the wise men of the East came searching for Him in the right place at the right time. What meaning does this story hold for us today as Christians and as a church? How can we avoid the mistakes of the people in Christ’s day as the prophecies⁸ of the last days are being fulfilled?

❷ Think about Christ as God. Why is this so important to our faith and wor-

ship? What do we lose if we do not understand Christ as being fully God?

❸ Think again about Mary. What must have been going through her mind at the miracle of Christ’s birth? Think how much Mary did not understand and how hard some of this might have been for her. (For example, Mary’s being pregnant without ever knowing a man certainly must have been hard on her.) But Mary was still able to praise the Lord and worship Him when there were so many unanswered questions, so many troublesome thoughts, so many unknowns. How can we learn to do the same—to worship and praise the Lord during times of uncertainty and unknowns? In fact, why might that be the best time to fully show an attitude (feeling) of worship?

8. prophecies—special messages from God, often explaining what will happen in the future.