November 7 Su (Optional) — John 4:16-26 — True Worship

When Assyria brought other peoples into the land of mostly-exiled Israel, their religions came with them. In today’s passage, we read something about the continued distortion of that mixed theology about 700 years later when Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well. We read earlier about their discussion concerning water; today we will read about their dialogue concerning true and distorted worship.

> 16 Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” 17 The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.” 19 The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” 21 Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 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. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” 25 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.” 26 Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.”

Twice, Jesus said that God seeks people to worship Him “…in spirit and truth” (vv. 23-24). The primary manner of our worship should be “in spirit,” i.e., more internal than external and more about an attitude than a place. The Samaritan woman was concerned about the place for worship: on “this mountain” (Mt. Gerizim) vs. “Jerusalem” (Mt. Moriah—cf. 2 Chron. 3:1). When Christ came, God shifted the emphasis of worship from place to person and from Jerusalem to Jesus. That doesn’t mean we should avoid public worship in a church (cf. Heb. 10:25) but that our worship should be centered on Christ who continually dwells within us. Secondly, Jesus said that we should worship “in…truth”; our theology needs to be correct. The Samaritans’ knowledge about worship was distorted by the religions of the peoples who had joined them 700 years earlier. Our knowledge about worship comes from what the Bible tells us about it. What it teaches us today is that we need to worship God in continuous relationship, “in spirit and truth.”

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Hezekiah becomes Judah’s king

Righteous Leadership — What a great example of a leader who was willing to go against the current popular ways of worship in order to be completely committed and obedient to Yahweh! Hezekiah was not only compared to David (v. 3) but he actually excelled him because there was no king before or after him who so completely trusted in God (v. 5). At the same time that the northern kingdom was going down in shame, Judah was becoming firm and strong in their obedient faith. Israel fell to Assyria but Judah stood up to them. Do you sometimes feel like your local or national government is too far gone to be redeemed? Remember Hezekiah! What national recovery requires is a righteous and courageous leader: “Righteousness exalts a nation…” (Prov. 14:34). Hezekiah was hugely successful because “the LORD was with him” (2 Kings 18:7). God provided both the power and the success. Hezekiah’s 29-year reign was a wonderful light that shined in Judah between the periods of wicked leadership by his father, Ahaz, and his son, Manasseh. Let’s enjoy reading about this refreshing time of Judah’s history! And while we are at it, remember that as you are living a righteous life, you are influencing others around you and molding future generations of people toward godliness.

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3 In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them. 4 He brought in the priests and the Levites and assembled them in the square on the east and said to them, “Hear me, Levites! Now consecrate yourselves, and consecrate the house of the LORD, the God of your fathers, and carry out the filth from the Holy Place. 5 For our fathers have been unfaithful and have done what was evil in the sight of the LORD our God. They have forsaken him and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the LORD and turned their backs. 6 They also shut the doors of the vestibule and put out the lamps and have not burned incense or offered burnt offerings in the Holy Place to the God of Israel. 7 Therefore the wrath of the LORD came on Judah and Jerusalem, and he has made them an object of horror, of astonishment, and of hissing, as you see with your own eyes. 8 For behold, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this. 9 Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD, the God of Israel, in order that his fierce anger may turn away from us. 10 My sons, do not now be negligent, for the LORD has chosen you to stand in his presence, to minister to him and to be his ministers and make offerings to him.”

12 Then the Levites arose, Mahath the son of Amasai, and Joel the son of Azariah, of the sons of the Kohathites; and of the sons of Merari, Kish the son of Abdi, and Azariah the son of Jehallelel; and of the Gershonites, Joah the son of Zimmah, and Eden the son of Joah; 13 and of the sons of Elizaphan, Shimri and Jehuel; and of the sons of Asaph, Zechariah and Mattaniah; 14 and of the sons of Heman, Jehuel and Shimei; and of the sons of Jeduthun, Shemaiah and Uzziel. 15 They gathered their brothers and consecrated themselves and went in as the king had commanded, by the words of the LORD, to cleanse the house of the LORD. 16 The priests went into the inner part of the house of the LORD to cleanse it, and they brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of the LORD into the court of the house of the LORD. And the Levites took it and carried it out to the brook Kidron. 17 They began to consecrate on the first day of the first month, and on the eighth day of the month they came to the vestibule of the LORD. Then for eight days they consecrated the house of the LORD, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they finished. 18 Then they went in to Hezekiah the king and said, “We have cleansed all the house of the LORD, the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the table for the showbread and all its utensils. 19 All the utensils that King Ahaz discarded in his reign when he was faithless, we have made ready and consecrated, and behold, they are before the altar of the LORD.”

ESV Footnote
(29:5) Hebrew impurity

First Things First — The new king wasted no time in righting the wrongs of his father. It was in the first month of his reign (vs. 3) that he began the cleansing process for the temple. He summoned the priests and Levites to challenge them to cleanse themselves and then the temple (v. 5). There was urgency involved. Hezekiah said, “My sons, do not now be negligent…” (v. 11). He had not wasted any time in getting started and he didn’t want them to waste time, either. They responded willingly and finished the cleansing process in 16 days (v. 17). I think it would be good to ask ourselves if we place the same kind of importance and urgency into putting God first in our lives. Make the time you spend with the Lord each day a priority! Make it happen! We don’t have Assyrians breathing down our necks as Judah did, but we do have Satan’s evil forces who are intent on destroying us. They want us to neglect our commitment to the Lord and our service to Him and others because they know it will weaken us and make us more vulnerable to attack.

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20 Then Hezekiah the king rose early and gathered the officials of the city and went up to the house of the LORD. 21 And they brought seven bulls, seven rams, seven lambs, and seven male goats for a sin offering for the kingdom and for the sanctuary and for Judah. And he commanded the priests, the sons of Aaron, to offer them on the altar of the LORD. 22 So they slaughtered the bulls, and the priests received the blood and threw it against the altar. And they slaughtered the rams, and their blood was thrown against the altar. And they slaughtered the lambs, and their blood was thrown against the altar. 23 Then the goats for the sin offering were brought to the king and the assembly, and they laid their hands on them, 24 and the priests slaughtered them and made a sin offering with their blood on the altar, to make atonement for all Israel. For the king commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for all Israel.

25 And he stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, harps, and lyres, according to the commandment of David and of Gad the king’s seer and of Nathan the prophet, for the commandment was from the LORD through his prophets. 26 The Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. 27 Then Hezekiah commanded that the burnt offering be offered on the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song to the LORD began also, and the trumpets, accompanied by the instruments of David king of Israel. 28 The whole assembly worshiped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded. All this continued until the burnt offering was finished. 29 When the offering was finished, the king and all who were present with him bowed themselves and worshiped. 30 And Hezekiah the king and the officials commanded the Levites to sing praises to the LORD with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed down and worshiped.

31 Then Hezekiah said, “You have now consecrated yourselves to the LORD. Come near; bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the house of the LORD.” And the assembly brought sacrifices and thank offerings, and all who were of a willing heart brought burnt offerings. 32 The number of the burnt offerings that the assembly brought was 70 bulls, 100 rams, and 200 lambs; all these were for a burnt offering to the LORD. 33 And the consecrated offerings were 600 bulls and 3,000 sheep. 34 But the priests were too few and could not flay all the burnt offerings, so until other priests had consecrated themselves, their brothers the Levites helped them, until the work was finished—for the Levites were more upright in heart than the priests in consecrating themselves. 35 Besides the great number of burnt offerings, there was the fat of the peace offerings, and there were the drink offerings for the burnt offerings. Thus the service of the house of the LORD was restored. 36 And Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced because God had provided for the people, for the thing came about suddenly.

ESV Footnote
(29:31) Hebrew filled your hand for

Ready to Worship — There were three good examples in this passage of people who were ready to get back to worshiping Yahweh. The first was the king as the leader. Now that the temple had been ceremonially cleansed, Hezekiah wanted it to be used for worship. He had shown urgency for both consecrating the temple and for worshiping in it. He “rose early” (v. 20) the very next day and quickly got others involved; he “gathered the officials of the city” (v. 20) to go to the temple and “commanded the priests” (v. 21) to get busy in starting the sacrifices. The second example of eager worshipers was the assembly of people, who “were of a willing heart” to bring burnt offerings (v. 31). Burnt offerings, which were totally consumed on the altar, were different than thank offerings, the meat of which was shared by the priests and the people who brought them. Being “of a willing heart” to unselfishly give a burnt offering was a total sacrifice. The third good example of ready worshipers were the Levites who “were more upright in heart than the priests” (v. 34), so that they had to help the fewer priests do their job. How ready are you for worship? Our pastor mentioned on Father’s Day
that the two least attended church services of the year in America were on Superbowl Sunday and Father’s Day. Why? Many men have higher priorities than worshiping God. The writer of Hebrews challenged us that we should “not [be] neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another…” (Heb. 10:25). We need to show our children and grandchildren the right way to be ready to worship.

November 11 Th Reading 225 — 2 Chronicles 30:1–27 — Hezekiah renew the Passover

Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem to keep the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel. For the king and his princes and all the assembly in Jerusalem had taken counsel to keep the Passover in the second month— for they could not keep it at that time because the priests had not consecrated themselves in sufficient number, nor had the people assembled in Jerusalem— and the plan seemed right to the king and all the assembly. So they decreed to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, that the people should come and keep the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel, at Jerusalem, for they had not kept it as often as prescribed. So couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with letters from the king and his princes, as the king had commanded, saying, “O people of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that he may turn again to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. Do not be like your fathers and your brothers, who were faithless to the LORD God of their fathers, so that he made them a desolation, as you see. Do not now be stiff-necked as your fathers were, but yield yourselves to the LORD and come to his sanctuary, which he has consecrated forever, and serve the LORD your God, that his fierce anger may turn away from you. For if you return to the LORD, your brothers and your children will find compassion with their captors and return to this land. For the LORD your God is gracious and merciful and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him.”

So the couriers went from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun, but they laughed them to scorn and mocked them. However, some men of Asher, of Manasseh, and of Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the LORD.

And many people came together in Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month, a very great assembly. They set to work and removed the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for burning incense they took away and threw into the brook Kidron. And they slaughtered the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the second month. And the priests and the Levites were ashamed, so that they consecrated themselves and brought burnt offerings into the house of the LORD. They took their accustomed posts according to the Law of Moses the man of God. The priests threw the blood that they received from the hand of the Levites. For there were many in the assembly who had not consecrated themselves. Therefore the Levites had to slaughter the Passover lamb for everyone who was not clean, to consecrate it to the LORD. For a majority of the people, many of them from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the Passover otherwise than as prescribed. For Hezekiah had prayed for them, saying, “May the good LORD pardon everyone who sets his heart to seek God, the LORD, the God of his fathers, even though not according to the sanctuary’s rules of cleanness.” And the LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people. And the people of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great gladness, and the Levites and the priests praised the LORD day by day, singing with all their might to the LORD. And Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to all the Levites who showed good skill in the service of the
LORD. So they ate the food of the festival for seven days, sacrificing peace offerings and giving thanks to the LORD, the God of their fathers.

23 Then the whole assembly agreed together to keep the feast for another seven days. So they kept it for another seven days with gladness. 24 For Hezekiah king of Judah gave the assembly 1,000 bulls and 7,000 sheep for offerings, and the princes gave the assembly 1,000 bulls and 10,000 sheep. And the priests consecrated themselves in great numbers. 25 The whole assembly of Judah, and the priests and the Levites, and the whole assembly that came out of Israel, and the sojourners who came out of the land of Israel, and the sojourners who lived in Judah, rejoiced. 26 So there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem. 27 Then the priests and the Levites arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard, and their prayer came to his holy habitation in heaven.

ESV Footnotes
(30:19) Hebrew not according to the cleanness of holiness
(30:21) Compare 1 Chronicles 13:8; Hebrew with instruments of might

Hezekiah’s Heart — Don’t you just love the heart of Hezekiah? God had placed him in leadership and he used it effectively in bringing people back to God. He had an obedient heart. He wanted to please God who had given Moses the ceremony of Passover, reminding future Israelites about God’s love and care for them. He had an evangelistic heart. It would have been very commendable if his efforts to bring people back to keeping the Passover had been concentrated only on his own subjects of Judah and Benjamin, but he also reached out to the remnant of Jews who remained in the northern territory. Even after 215 years of separation, Hezekiah still considered them to be his brothers. He had no selfish reason for this action; they would not become part of his kingdom. He was just concerned about their relationship to Yahweh. Hezekiah also had an accommodating heart, wanting to make it possible to include everyone. That is why he prayed to ask God’s pardon for celebrating the Passover one month late since they were unable to do it earlier because of the long process of ceremonially cleansing the temple. He also had an infectious heart. He appreciated the priests and Levites for their enthusiasm in doing their job well (v. 22); they were so inspired by this spirit that they “arose and blessed the people” (v. 27). Because Hezekiah ministered to them, they ministered to others. Are you encouraged by the heart and actions of one of your leaders? Write them a note today to thank them for their faithfulness and influence! Remember, also, that people catch the enthusiasm you have for God. Let’s do our best to influence others to turn to God!

Meditation: The Hebrew word shuv is used six times in four verses in this reading. It means to turn back to an original place. For the Jews in this passage, it involved the invitation to turn back to God. Three times it is used in that way: “…return to the LORD … return to the LORD … return to him” (vv. 6, 9). That is repentance. The other three times, it is used as an action of God. First, because of their repentance (“…his fierce anger [would] turn way” from them—v. 8), then, God would “turn again to the remnant” of the northern tribes (v. 6), allowing some captives to “return to this land” (v. 9). When people turn toward God, He turns toward them. It is a pretty simple principle but too seldomly applied.

November 12 F Reading 226 — 2 Chronicles 31:1–21 — Hezekiah destroys idols and reorganizes

1 Now when all this was finished, all Israel who were present went out to the cities of Judah and broke in pieces the pillars and cut down the Asherim and broke down the high places and the altars throughout all Judah and Benjamin, and in Ephraim and Manasseh, until they had destroyed them all. Then all the people of Israel returned to their cities, every man to his possession.
And Hezekiah appointed the divisions of the priests and of the Levites, division by division, each according to his service, the priests and the Levites, for burnt offerings and peace offerings, to minister in the gates of the camp of the LORD and to give thanks and praise. The contribution of the king from his own possessions was for the burnt offerings: the burnt offerings of morning and evening, and the burnt offerings for the Sabbaths, the new moons, and the appointed feasts, as it is written in the Law of the LORD. And he commanded the people who lived in Jerusalem to give the portion due to the priests and the Levites, that they might give themselves to the Law of the LORD. As soon as the command was spread abroad, the people of Israel gave in abundance the firstfruits of grain, wine, oil, honey, and of all the produce of the field. And they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything. And the people of Israel and Judah who lived in the cities of Judah also brought in the tithe of cattle and sheep, and the tithe of the dedicated things that had been dedicated to the LORD their God, and laid them in heaps. When Hezekiah and the princes came and saw the heaps, they blessed the LORD and his people Israel. And Hezekiah questioned the priests and the Levites about the heaps. Azariah the chief priest, who was of the house of Zadok, answered him, “Since they began to bring the contributions into the house of the LORD, we have eaten and had enough and have plenty left, for the LORD has blessed his people, so that we have this large amount left.”

Then Hezekiah commanded them to prepare chambers in the house of the LORD, and they prepared them. And they faithfully brought in the contributions, the tithes, and the dedicated things. The chief officer in charge of them was Conaniah the Levite, with Shimei his brother as second, while Jehiel, Azariah, Nahath, Asahel, Jerimoth, Jozabad, Eliel, Ismachiah, Mahath, and Benaiah were overseers assisting Conaniah and Shimei his brother, by the appointment of Hezekiah the king and Azariah the chief officer of the house of God. Kore the son of Imnah the Levite, keeper of the east gate, was over the freewill offerings to God, to apportion the contribution reserved for the LORD and the most holy offerings. Eden, Miniamin, Jeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah, and Shecaniah were faithfully assisting him in the cities of the priests, to distribute the portions to their brothers, old and young alike, by divisions, except those enrolled by genealogy, males from three years old and upward—all who entered the house of the LORD as the duty of each day required—for their service according to their offices, by their divisions. The enrollment of the priests was according to their fathers’ houses; that of the Levites from twenty years old and upward was according to their offices, by their divisions. They were enrolled with all their little children, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, the whole assembly, for they were faithful in keeping themselves holy. And for the sons of Aaron, the priests, who were in the fields of common land belonging to their cities, there were men in the several cities who were designated by name to distribute portions to every male among the priests and to everyone among the Levites who was enrolled.

Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah, and he did what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God. And every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God and in accordance with the law and the commandments, seeking his God, he did with all his heart, and prospered.

First Priorities — Hezekiah didn’t waste time in putting God first. During the first month of his reign, he had the priests, Levites, and the temple cleansed. During the second month, the Passover festival was restored and extended. Then, in the third month (v. 7), he organized the ministry of the priests and Levites and commanded the people to support them. There was a responsibility to provide for them because God had ordered it through Moses; it was “the portion due to the priests and the Levites” (v. 4, emphasis added). The people caught the vision of their responsibility to support those who served the Lord in the temple: “As soon as the command was spread abroad, the people of Israel gave in abundance” (v. 5). They were immediate and generous in their giving so that they “had enough and … plenty left” (v. 10). Does this generous attitude characterize you and the members of
your church toward the funding of your pastoral staff ("priests") and their support staff ("Levites")? Don’t be hesitant to give to the support of your church and their staff; it enables them to do what God has called them to do. The people in Hezekiah’s day gave in order that their spiritual leaders “might give themselves to the Law of the LORD” (v. 4). It frees God’s servants from having to find a part-time job to adequately support their families. Our giving is evidence of how much we are making God our first priority.

Meditation: The final verse of this chapter reads as an epitaph for Hezekiah’s life. Wouldn’t this look good on your gravestone: “[Insert your name] was good and right and faithful before the LORD” (v. 20). We don’t do these things to enter the kingdom of God but they are done in love because we are committed servants to our King of kings. Also, Hezekiah didn’t do this out of duty alone; “he did [it] with all his heart” (v. 20). It was willing and genuine commitment.

November 13 Sa (Optional) — The Heart of Barnabas

The obedient, evangelistic, accommodating, and infectious heart of Hezekiah reminded me of the NT Barnabas. We read about some Barnabas last month when we considered the early failure of his cousin, John Mark. Let’s look today at the heart of Barnabas. He is introduced this way:

>Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus” (Acts 4:36).

His real name was Joseph but he was renamed Barnabas by the apostles because of his outstanding heart for ministry to others. Barnabas means “son of encouragement.” His ministry focus was to encourage others and we see that happening in many places in the book of Acts.

After the violent history of Saul against the church was ended with his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, the Christians in Jerusalem and Judah were very reluctant to accept his conversion as being genuine. So, Barnabas stepped into the story with his supportive and encouraging heart to defend Saul before the church.

>But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus” (Acts 9:27).

Later, when the church leaders in Jerusalem heard that many Gentiles in Antioch had been converted to Christ, it was the Encourager they sent to Antioch to check it out.

>But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord” (Acts 11:20-24).

Further description of the heart of Barnabas is expressed in verse 24: “...he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.” But this encourager remembered Saul, who had gone home to Tarsus after being shunned by the Christians in Judah.
Barnabas saw potential in Saul and he saw the need for teaching in the Antioch church, so his supportive heart put them together.

We read earlier about Barnabas' supportive heart when he took his young cousin, John Mark, under his wing for training in ministry.

Even after John Mark's failure, Barnabas didn't give up on him but gave him another chance to develop by taking him on a missionary trip to Cyprus, as we read earlier.

I just prayed for God to create in me a Barnabas-like heart that has compassion for people. Is that something you need to do as well?