

The Church's Worship

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TEXT: Hebrews 2:10-18; 8:1-2;12:18-24

PRAYER:

Our Heavenly Father, as we turn to your word and listen for your voice, we pray that together we may become conscious that you are with us. That your word still has its ancient power. But the Lord Jesus Christ speaks to us in His grace. And we ask that, as we are in worship and praise before you, we may also be disciples and pupils in the school of Jesus Christ. So speak to us, humble us under your mighty hand, and exalt us by your grace to worship and praise you. We ask it for Jesus, our Savior sake. Amen.

INTRODUCTION:

Now, today we continue our series of sermons on the subject of the church. And our scripture reading this morning is in the letter to the Hebrews. First of all, in Hebrews chapter two and then in Hebrews chapter eight, pages 1002 in fact, is where we're going to begin. Page 1002 in the pew Bible in Hebrews Chapter two, verse ten. The author of Hebrews is encouraging us to focus our gaze upon Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURE READING: Hebrews 2:10-18; 8:1-2;12:18-24

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin.

(All belong to one. Perhaps all belong to one family.).

That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise". And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, (now, turning from the 22nd Psalm to Isaiah, chapter eight again.) "Behold, I and the children God has given me'. Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore, he (Christ) had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

The author then goes on to speak about this high priestly ministry of Jesus Christ. And in chapter eight, verse one, page 1005, in the pew Bible, he brings us to what he calls the point.

The point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. Hebrews 8:1-2

And then I want to add some verses from Hebrews Chapter 12 that bring this theme to its climax. Hebrews Chapter 12, Page 1009, Hebrews 12, verse 18.

For you, (you New Testament Christians), you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. (He's talking about Mount Sinai.) For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of

a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

SERMON:

If you go into a room full of Christians today and the conversation turns to the particular church that you attend, one of the almost inevitable questions you will be asked will be the question, "What is the worship style in your church?" And it may not be long in the conversation before what the journals and the magazines today call "worship wars" break out. Christians today have developed an entire vocabulary to describe the way they worship God.

And the fact of the matter is that the worship wars of the 21st century are not the first worship wars the Christian church has ever faced or endured. Indeed, in a sense, for the very souls and Christian lives of these early Christians to whom the letter to the Hebrews was first written, in their souls, there was a kind of worship war going on. They found themselves embattled. Many of them had very literally been disinherited. Some of them had been imprisoned for the sake of the gospel. And because it looks as though their background was a Jewish background, and the worship of the temple and the great ritual of the temple occasions, the great feasts, the thronging crowds, one of the things that tempted them to go back was the glory days of worshiping together in the temple. And now they were worshiping together in one another's homes in the biggest room they could find, or perhaps somewhere down by the river side. And there were voices that said, "Oh, if you would just come back to the glory days of the worship style that you used to have." And one of the things the author of the letter to the Hebrews says over and over and over again to these Hebrew Christians is this, "Don't be mistaken by appearances. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, because the one glory that was absent from the Jerusalem temple, with all its ritual and all its splendor and all the different ways in which it pointed forwards to the future, the one thing or the one person who was absent from it was the one who transforms Christian worship, the Lord Jesus Christ himself."

And one of the great lessons that this unknown writer is teaching these Christians is the marvelous lesson of the ministry of Jesus Christ in the worship services of his people. In fact, in Hebrews Chapter eight, the author uses a word to describe the Lord Jesus. But

really it is actually the word from which we get the word liturgy in English or liturgist. And it speaks about the Lord Jesus here in Hebrews chapter eight and verse two, as the liturgist in the true temple of God. In other words, he is saying, Christian friends understand that the great and glorious thing about Christian worship is not the context in which it takes place, but the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is present among his people and He is the one who is leading his people in worship and praise.

Actually, there is a relatively easy way to test that. It is to ask yourself, "What were the circumstances or what were the events of the three or four worship services that have made the most lasting impression on your life -- and you perhaps felt have done you most good? I think if we were all to mention these today to one another, we'd be astonished at how different they are. Some of them in small situations, some of them in unexpected situations, some of them in another country, some of them in grand scale situations. But the one thing that unites them all in our experience is, of course, the sense we have had of the presence of Jesus Christ and the ministry of Jesus Christ.

In my teens, I used to go to a Bible class and at the beginning of the Bible class, every Sunday we would sing this song, "Jesus Stand among Us in your risen power. Let this time of worship be a holy hour." And I used to wonder, "Yes, but what is Jesus doing when he stands among us?" Is he just standing there among us? And I want all to briefly, at least all to briefly for me to draw your attention to some of the things that this great second chapter of Hebrews tells us the Lord Jesus is doing here and now as we gather together to worship.

The first of them is very obviously this: Jesus gathers us as his family. In Hebrews chapter two, verse 12, and then through to verse 13, there are quotations from the Old Testament scriptures. The third of them is from the prophecy of Isaiah. And Isaiah is saying, "Lord, here am I. And the children you have given me and you have given us as a special community to be signs of your glory and of your grace in the midst of an ungodly world. And I am gathering my children around me and bringing them into your presence."

And amazingly, the author puts these words now into the mouth of Jesus. And he says, "Christian, do you see that the Lord Jesus gathers us together as his family, as his children. And as he is our worship leader? he leads us into the presence of the

Heavenly Father. And as we say, the words, "Let us worship God", he is saying the words, "Father, here am I and the children you have given me." And we are conscious or become conscious in a very special sense that these occasions are occasions of family reunion. You remember how the Apostle John at the beginning of the Book of Revelation when he was on the barren island of Patmos, says that on the Lord's day he was in the spirit. And when he saw that door opened into heaven, what was he seeing? He was seeing the heavenly family of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those amazing beasts, whatever they mean, that surround the throne and the angels and the saints of every age and the glory of the Father. And it is as though the author of Hebrews is saying, "Don't you see that when you assemble in worship, wherever you are, the Lord Jesus opens the door of heaven and he leads you into the father's presence." And you come burdened, you come, perhaps with a sense of guilt and shame. You find it almost impossible to sing the songs of joy. And he draws you from behind his back. And he says, "Heavenly Father, here am I and the children that you have given to me."

A friend of mine led a tour last year to the seven churches of the Book of Revelation. And I said, "Did you go to the island of Patmos?" "No", he said, "I asked the people about going to Patmos and they said, 'It will take you a day to get there and a day to get back. And when you get to Patmos, you don't see anything.'" And I thought to myself, "Tell that one to the Apostle John." But, you know, that's church, isn't it? That's worship. As Jesus leads us into the presence of the Father, it's actually possible to be in the building and to see nothing. As it was possible to have sat beside the Apostle John on the island of Patmos and to have seen nothing. But, Oh, like John in the spirit on the Lord's day, to hear the voice that comes from heaven, that says the door is open, come up here and share in the glorious family celebration of our God. That's what Hebrews 12 is speaking about. We've not come to Mount Zion, but we've come, in a sense, to the very edge of the heavenly Jerusalem to share in the worship service that our Lord Jesus Christ leads us -- he gathers us as his family.

But not only does the Lord Jesus gather us as his family, the author tells us in the second place that the Lord Jesus leads us in our praises. Look at verse 12, which is a quotation from the 22nd Psalm that all of us know because it's the Psalm the Lord Jesus was quoting on the cross. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" But that Psalm goes on to speak about what the Lord Jesus will do in his triumph and his

resurrection. And so the author puts these words into the mouth of our Lord Jesus. "In the midst of the congregation, I will sing your praises."

I wonder if you ever think that that's what's happening when we sing and when we stand to praise. We are we are being led by our musicians and our instrumentalists and our, our choir. And we are leading one another, but actually, we are all being conducted by the Lord Jesus. And we are joining our voices with the Lord Jesus, as he says, "Come on now. I am singing the praises of my Heavenly Father in the midst of the great congregation. You sing along with me." My friend, the late Dr. Clowney, used to say, "Whenever you stand to sing, think that you are sharing your hymn book with the Lord Jesus." And of course, the glory of that is no matter how badly you sing, or how well you sing, to be able to sing with the Lord Jesus. I'm sure some of you in your secret hearts, your great ambition when you get to heaven is to be able to sing as well there as you do in the shower in the morning. And you listen to these great singers and you think, wouldn't it be glorious to sing a duet with him or with her? And for my voice to be covered by his voice and encouraged by her voice and. The author is telling us, "But dear ones, this is what you are doing when you come to worship. You are being led into His presence by the Lord Jesus and he is the presenter of the people's praises." He, in a sense, is the heavenly organist who says, "You will sing in tune with me -- in spiritual perfect pitch".

So Jesus gathers us together as his family. Jesus says, the author of Hebrews, leads us in our praises. But then there's another thing here, and it's found in the quotation again, interestingly, in verse 12, "I will tell of your name to my brothers." Jesus who gathers us, Jesus who leads us, is the Jesus who preaches God's word to us. Jesus preaches God's word to us. That's why we need the Holy Spirit in preaching so that by His Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus will take the exposition of His word as He took it, you remember, on the Emmaus Road and work it right into our hearts so that we become conscious that it's the Lord Jesus himself who is speaking to us. And we we want to say, "Lord did not our hearts burn within us as you spoke to us from your word." And so we discover in the ministry of the word in all its various locations that our hearts are engaging, our minds are engaging in a kind of dialog with the Lord Jesus. Sometimes it is a fighting dialog. We are saying to him, "Don't you go there? Leave me alone, Lord Jesus." And sometimes it's a dialog that that just makes us rest our weary souls on him because we are able to say to him, "I didn't know you knew about that, Lord Jesus. And I've been

hiding it even from myself." And he speaks to us through the ministry of his word. That's incidentally why our sermons are a little longer than is standard these days. It is not because it takes us a long time to say things. It is because we feel we are engaged in a conversation with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Had a phone call after a morning service, once in another place where a family I knew had a guest who was interested in the daughter in the family. And the message that was pressed on from this young man, well, actually wasn't so young. He was a very distinguished lawyer. And he said, "Tell Sinclair that that was a very interesting sermon this morning. I rather enjoyed it. But, you know, 10 or 11 minutes, is 10 or 11 minutes the standard time for these things." And I thought, "I'm old enough not to take this even from the most distinguished lawyer in the world." And so I said very generously, "Ask him when the last time was he won a major law trial on the basis of a ten minute speech?" Well, that was nasty, wasn't it? But you see, he hadn't actually experienced the preaching of Jesus. All he had heard was my preaching. Well, maybe ten minutes was quite enough of my preaching. But when you're hearing the Lord Jesus Christ through His word, then you're, you're caught up. You lose sense of time and even sense of place because you know that you are engaging with him. You find a young man who has fallen in love and he spent three hours. What's he been doing? He's just actually been talking to a girl and he comes back to his dorm room and his friends say, "Well, what were you doing?" "We were talking." "But you've been away three hours. What have you to talk about to a girl for three hours?" Ahh, but you see, he discovered a soul dialog and a soul mate.

And so Jesus, who gathers us as his family, is the Jesus who leads us in our worship, is the Jesus who preaches to us from God's Word. And He is finally the Jesus who comes to meet us in our need. Now we all know that we do not come to worship the Lord simply because we want him to meet our needs, but because He is worthy of our praise and of our worship and our honor. But the glorious thing is that he does meet our needs. And we become conscious of that because of the wonder of his presence as our eyes are fixed upon Jesus. As the author goes on to say, "He's a Jesus who has gone through all the tests and struggles and trials through which we have gone, and he's got the power to see us through them." And so as Christ himself is present among his people and our eyes are fixed upon him, we are able to say to him, "Lord Jesus, I'm going through things I cannot handle. But you have the love for me and the power to

help me." And although we leave the building conscious that we go back to face different and sometimes difficult situations. Yet there is something different because we know that he is able to help us and strengthen us and he will be with us. And by his grace, he will see us through.

Many years ago, when I was a very young minister, I went along to speak at a youth rally. In a place I thought I knew well. And I casually opened the doors of the auditorium expecting to see a crowd of young people there. And I was absolutely astonished as I opened the double doors, striding towards me was a man, who he actually seemed about eight feet tall, he was clothed in the garments, the liturgical garments of a Greek Orthodox priest. He was swinging a huge censer. The room was full of smoke and he was looking directly at me and marching straight towards me. I got such a shock. I instantaneously closed the doors and stepped back. And I thought to myself, "Did I see that? Or, was I just imagining things?" I kind of wished the rest of my life I'd had the courage to open the doors again to see whether it was real or whether I had just been imagining it. And I often therefore think that as we leave church, and especially as strangers are among us, perhaps strangers who know very little or nothing of this, that one of the most glorious things that could happen is, as they are walking back to their automobile, the thought that's in their mind is, "Did I really see that, sense that? Or was just imagining it. I must go back and see because I feel I have, I've tasted heaven in that place." And all because the Lord Jesus Christ has been at the center of our worship. That's why in some ways, the most magical words we are privileged to hear every week are the words, "Let us worship God". Because they are simply an invitation to hear the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ as he gathers us as his family saying to his Father, "Father, here am I and all the children you have given me. Let them worship You.

It's glorious when it's real. And when it's real the glory moves out of the building and begins to touch men and women and boys and girls. And they are drawn to the grace and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ too. Ohh, may we know it. May we know it. For his great name's sake.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the amazing privileges that you pour out upon us as your children. And we pray that we may feel ourselves together to be tasting and touching the glorious presence of our Lord Jesus Christ who stands among us to meet our every need. Hear us and answer our prayer for his great name's sake. Amen.