

# Our Lord's Day Worship Service – *Hebrews 12:18-29*

**Introduction** – You have probably heard and been a part of the worship wars. Formal-vs-informal, seeker-vs-believer oriented, traditional-vs-contemporary, kids-in-vs-kids-out, and on and on it goes. Unfortunately, most of the arguments are fueled by emotion and personal taste, leading us to more and more schism. But we are instructed to let the Word of God be our final authority in everything we believe and do, and we are told that it is sufficient to do so in everything for our lives (2 Tim 3:16f). If this is true, then how much more so specifically for our worship of God.

**Worshipping God Just Before 70AD** – The book of Hebrews, in one sense, is a book about how to worship God. The warning throughout this book is that these Christians should not return to Jerusalem to worship because if they do, they would find themselves at a place coming under apocalyptic judgment. Not only that, but they would be denying their faith in Jesus Christ, the better-Moses, the better-Aaron, the better, once-for-all sacrifice. They were instead to go to a place that, on the face of it, seemed to be less glorious, less real. But, the writer will argue, it is not less glorious or real for those who have faith like those in Chapter 11 (see 11:1). If the readers in that day did not understand this (and here our application is the same) they will not understand that there is now a better-mountain, a better-city, a better-temple for worship and it no longer has a single location *on earth*. But faith is not pretending. Faith is living what you know to be true even when it is not visible or fully apparent to all – even yourself.

**The Torn Veil** – One important happening pointed to a whole new heavens and earth coming forth from the death of Jesus and that was the rending of the veil of the temple in two (Matt 27:51-53). This event alone made sacrifices useless, for the holy of holies had now been rendered unclean and the old covenant obsolete. But, in addition, we were learning that the separation between heaven and earth was no longer going to exist. Jesus is now the sole King and Lord of both. Not only does He mediate for us in heaven, but in union and communion with Him, we are brought into heaven, into the real holy of holies itself. We are told in Heb 4:16 to come boldly to the throne of grace and he doesn't mean symbolically or figuratively. In the new covenant, he means actually and really.

**So You're Going to Heaven I Hear** (Heb 12:18-24) – This is the context and the point of this section we now come to. We have come to a real and more terrifying mountain than the real and terrifying Mt. Sinai. The holiness, the 'real-ness' of God is greater at Mt. Zion to which we have come, also known as the city of the living God. Now, where is that? Through verses 22-24 we see that we have been brought up into heaven.

**And What Is Happening There?** (Heb 12:25-29) – Our eyes cannot tell us. But by faith, scripture does tell us what is happening. Our worship service must be enveloped in faith – *the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*. The whole church on earth, the church catholic, is drawn together and united with the church triumphant (triumphing?) in heaven. Here, God Himself speaks to us (v25). These words are shaking heaven and earth. In Revelation, we have all kinds of examples where words are spoken and things are released upon the earth. The earth is also being shaken, like a dog shaking off the unwanted water or a crab shaking off the old crusted, outgrown shell. At the same time, before this better, more real temple, we are being shaken by God's Word, for we have not yet been fully sanctified. Another way of saying this is that we are being presented before Him as a sacrifice and His Word is cutting us open. His Word is a two-edged sword (Heb 4:12), a *machaira*, the long knife used to cut and prepare animals for sacrifice (the knife Abraham carried with him to sacrifice Isaac). We are received perfectly and gladly because we are in Christ, justified through His blood. This means that, accepted by God, we come and hear the words of our redemption, our deliverance, our adoption and sealed hope again (just as the people of Moses heard at Mt. Sinai), and we hear the terms of our covenant, how we are to live, as well. God by His Spirit brings us before the Father as we stand united in the Son, and we are empowered by the Spirit to live in terms of this new covenant, this new creation.

**Connected to Our Liturgy** – Understanding where we are helps us understand what is going on and what we are to do.

**True Sacrifice** – Augustine understood and taught that the NT sacrifices were real sacrifices, in contrast to the merely symbolic sacrifices of the OT. In the OT, the worshipper himself did not draw near, but relied on an animal substitute. We still have a substitute, but He is our covenant Head, and united to Him, we do draw near ourselves. The OT worshipper never was able to sacrifice himself; we are commanded to do so (Rom 12:1). And, continuing on in Hebrews, we are told to *offer up a sacrifice of praise* (Heb 13:15), *the fruit of our lips*.

**True Presence** – We ourselves have come into the holy of holies, and now all heaven and earth are being shaken unto perfect holiness. And it is in this assembly that the Lord finds most pleasure (Ps 87:2). But there is no buffer between ourselves and God and so we are exhorted to *worship God acceptably with reverence and godly fear*. There is true intimacy with our Father, but it is no breezy intimacy.

**True Assurance** – Yet there is great joy, unspeakable joy. For having come before the Consuming Fire, we find that we have passed through the judgment in Christ's perfect sacrifice and have been admitted into the general assembly of the first-born. He is glad you are here. He rejoices over you with singing. He joins with us in the song of the Lamb that was slain. He loves you – and that is what you are to hear over and over again, like a Husband over His wife, a Father over His children, an Architect over His cathedral. And it is to never end, like a multi-course Thanksgiving Feast that keeps coming and coming.

**True Calling and Sending** – God has called us here in a more real way than in any of the festivals of the OT (Psalm 122:1-2). And when He calls us here, He invites us to join with Him in the shaking of the earth and a receiving of a kingdom (Heb 12:28). As kings and priests ourselves, we worship on behalf of the whole world. We are, in one sense, worshipping for the sake of mankind. And this is right, for Jesus came to save the world; He did not come that the world would be condemned (John 3:16-17). But how will the world be saved? And so we pray "*let your name be hallowed, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*," before the real throne of grace – a prayer the throne of grace intends to answer. With His name placed upon us in benediction, we are sent out as His ambassadors to do the works He has prepared for us to do – the answers to our prayers are already ahead of us. We go to accomplish what, in one sense, He has already accomplished.