



The Privilege and Expectations of Worship

Series: The Wonder of Worship

Hebrews 10:19-25

April 12, 2015

Pastor Nick Shaffer

It may have seemed last week that we took break on Resurrection Sunday from our Worship Series. But that was really just an illusion. In fact, the sermon last week from 1 Corinthians 15 sets the foundation for the sermon this week. Think about it. Last week, Paul emphasized that what was of supreme importance, the supreme message, taking precedence over everything else in life, is the gospel of Christ, who died for our sins, was buried, and three days later rose again from the grave to be seen by a host of witnesses – the gospel that saves us and eventually will result in our being glorified with Christ and gathered into the glory of Heaven on the day that He returns to this earth to vindicate His people and to judge the unrepentant. The gospel is of supreme importance because it is the message of the life and saving work the supremely glorious Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I want you to notice how this dovetails perfectly with what we are looking at this morning in the book of Hebrews. By the time that we come to this text, the writer of Hebrews has spent the first 9 chapters of his sermon detailing the glory and supremacy of Jesus Christ in a number of ways: His glory as the radiance and exact imprint of God; as the final word from God; His supremacy over angels, over Moses, and over the high priest of Israel because he is God in flesh, the Son of God, the Word of God, and the one who makes the final sacrifice that gives us forgiveness and peace with God, through the offering of Himself as the propitiation for our sins. He establishes the supreme worth of Christ's sacrifice on our behalf, the transcendent worth of the blood of Jesus that is infinitely superior to the blood of bulls and goats -- the OT sacrifices. Truly, Jesus is the author and the finisher of our salvation – but to what end? For what purpose? That is what he addresses here and the answer is: so that we who were rebels and estranged from God, under His just judgment for our sinful rebellion, could be brought near and be made sons and daughters -- worshippers of God.

That is the heart and the crux of Christ's mission. That is the end game, if you will. Remember that Jesus said to the woman at the well that the chief desire of God is that He would have worshippers who worship Him in spirit and in truth. He is seeking such worshippers from among the rebels of the earth and that is why He sent His Son into this world to seek and save and, by His grace, make rebels into worshippers of God, to remove the barriers to our worship and delight in Him. That is what is in view in these first few verses of the text that we are looking at this morning – everything that Christ did to make of us worshippers of God, to grant us access into the presence of God. This is a vital text to understand the privilege and expectations of worship. I want you to see first with me this morning the

Foundations for Our Worship (Or, Why We Can Worship God) (19-21) Look at what the writer of Hebrews says in verse 19. Looking back to the glories of Christ and of His sacrifice for our salvation so that we could approach God, the writer gives us three reasons why we can draw near to God in worship. He says: ***“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God,”*** (Hebrews 10:19–21, ESV) He calls them brothers, fellow believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and he reminds them that the first reason that we can worship God is that ***we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus***. The way has been opened into the very presence of God, the barriers of our sinfulness having been broken down by the blood of Jesus, shed for our sake, through which we have redemption, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace and which has purified our consciences from dead works – from works of the flesh, from a life of sin – in order to serve – or worship – the Living God. (Cf. Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:14)

We can worship God with confidence, come into His presence with boldness, with certainty, knowing that we will not be turned away, but we will be received with grace and mercy, because all of our guilt before God has been taken away. Hallelujah! Christians have confidence to enter the presence of God and to worship Him because of objective truth, because of something that is outside of us. We do not have confidence to worship because of a certain level of spiritual performance that we have mustered, or because we are “doing well” in our obedience this week. We are confident to enter the presence of God because of the perfection of Another, not our own.

This is not to say that Christians should never grieve over their sins. We should feel sin acutely. Christ paid too great a price for us to be casual about disobedience, but here is the thing. Our first instinct many times when we are aware of personal sin is to avoid God because we have no confidence that He will accept us. Instead, even then, we should have humble confidence to enter God's presence, trusting in the promise of forgiveness and cleansing, as we confess and forsake our sins for Him, to lay hold of Him. God desires that we draw near to Him with the assurance that He will receive us and in fact delights to receive us, because He does. Listen to the words of Zephaniah as he describes God's delight in His people: ***"The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."*** (Zephaniah 3:17, ESV) God invites us to draw near to Him and to do so in confidence, recognizing the liberty and freedom we have to do so, because of Christ.

Christ has opened for us the way into the presence of the Father. ***We have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh...*** The writer of Hebrews is telling us that as those who know Christ as their wrath-bearer, as their Savior, who trust in the blood of Christ for redemption, we stand before the doorway to the presence of the Lord with free and open access to God, to the "holy places." This is the second reason that we can approach God in worship – because Christ has opened the way. The writer of Hebrews is using temple or tabernacle imagery as he describes our privilege.

The "holy places" or the Holy of holies was that place in the Temple in the OT where the Ark of the Covenant was and where the manifest presence of God dwelt with His people. But you remember that in the OT, the Holy of holies was off limits to everyone except for the high priest and he could enter it only once a year on the Day of Atonement as he took the blood of the sacrifice for Israel's sins into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled it on the Mercy Seat. The Holy of Holies, the place of God's manifest presence, was blocked off from all worshippers and even from the other priests by a thick curtain, protecting the sinful men and women from the holiness of God. But Jesus has opened that way into God's presence by His flesh.

The writer of Hebrews is saying that Jesus' flesh is like that curtain in the tabernacle or the temple, not that He blocks the way to God **but** that He is the way to God. It is through Him, through His flesh – His incarnation, His taking upon Himself our humanity without any

diminishment of His deity and through His flesh torn on our behalf, for our sin, that we have access to God. When the flesh of Jesus Christ was torn for us at the cross, the way to God was open. His was the only sacrifice that has ever opened the way for men to enter into eternal fellowship with God. It is the death of Christ that opens sweet communion with the Father for all who trust Christ. It gives such meaning to Christ's words when He said: **"I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture."** (John 10:9, ESV) Or **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** (John 14:6, ESV)

Jesus is the new and living way to the presence of God. It is new – new in the sense that is fresh, recent, and different even. It is new in the sense that we have what the Old Testament saints did not have – the right of entrance into the presence of the Lord, a way into God's personal and relational presence, into intimate and real communion with Him, opened by Christ's life, death, and resurrection. The OT saints did not enjoy such an invitation from God because their sins had not yet been atoned for by the blood of Jesus Christ. Now, as a result of what Jesus has done -- this fresh, recent, new thing -- all of God's people have, as their privilege, immediate and intimate access to God in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Through Jesus we may pass directly into the throne room of God, united by faith to our Savior. That is new.

It is also a living way in the sense that it is lasting and eternal. Our access to God in worship is rooted in Christ, who was dead for our sins but now is alive forevermore. For that reason, there is no danger of this way ever becoming obsolete, ever closing or passing away. It cannot, because Christ Who is the way is eternal. He cannot die and Christ who has risen from the dead, never to die again is the **great priest over the house of God**. And that is reason number three that we can worship God. We have an eternal great priest over the household of God.

It was the role of the high priests and of the other priests in the OT to take the worship offerings of the people, to prepare them and to present them to God. It was his role to lead and direct the people of God in their expressions of worship to Him. That is Christ's role as well, but to a far greater degree. He has prepared and presented to God, on our behalf, an offering that we could never bring. It is through His offering of the perfect sacrifice – His own dear blood – that we are invited to draw near with confidence. As our high priest, Christ stands continually in the presence of God the Father, securing our acceptance with

God and interceding for us. And listen, if our High Priest who **“suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18, ESV)**, is forever at the right hand of the Father in heaven, we can be **confident** that joined to Christ by faith, we belong there too.

And like the OT priests Christ leads our worship but in a way that is far beyond what the priests could ever have done. He takes all of our offerings of worship – our singing, our praise, our prayers, our preaching, our responding to His leading, our giving, our ministering, our confession, our repentance – all that we do in worship – He takes our offerings of worship and sanctifies them by His blood and makes them acceptable in the eyes of God. This is awesome. This is the foundation of our worship – the reasons why we can worship God – in these first 3 verses of the text.

So the writer of Hebrews is telling us how it is that we have been made worshippers of God, how it is that we can personally and confidently enter into the spiritual presence of God and the point that he is making is this: “Don’t take the grace of God for granted. Do not treat this incredible gift with contempt. Do not handle this privilege lightly or treat access to God in personal and corporate worship as something insignificant or trivial, as something insubstantial or frivolous, but treat it as the precious, treasured, cherished, invaluable blessing and privilege that it is.” And I say that because of the commands that he gives in light of these words as it regards worship. We have been given a great privilege and with it come great expectations from God.

The Great Expectations of Worship (22-25) It’s easy to follow the expectations that are upon us as the result of being granted access to the Living God. All you have to do is follow the sentences that begin with “Let us.”

1) “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” (Hebrews 10:22, ESV)

First, the writer of Hebrews is saying, if the way into the presence of God has been paved for you like this, then take advantage of it, come and draw near to God. Don’t treat the work of Christ with contempt, but take full advantage of what He died to give you. The call to draw near simply means to come into the presence of God to worship Him, to praise and adore

Him, to commune with Him and to know Him and His heart and desires intimately and personally. To draw near to God is to come to know the greatness of His person, to delight in His truth and His will, with certainty that there is great reward in pursuing a deepening personal relationship with Him. It is a call to worship Him, to delight in Him, to make Him your boast and delight, to dwell with Him and to find supreme satisfaction in Him. This is what Christ died to give us. That is the first command that the writer of Hebrews gives to us. You have been given the opportunity to draw near – do it! And how do you do that? Well, you do it...

With a true heart...not flippantly or casually, not mindlessly or irreverently, with sincerity, with a heart that is filled with passion and love for God and a desire to love and honor Him more, to have your heart for God refreshed and renewed. Come with a desire to meet with Him, and hear from Him, and respond to Him, understanding the gravity of the privilege given to you. We are to come

In full assurance of faith... that is, without wavering, but certain that Christ has done all things necessary to grant us access to God and to maintain our standing with God. It is to come with complete confidence in the Great High Priest, that He takes my feeble praise, my frail petitions and renders them acceptable to God. And it is to come

With our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water... We are to draw near to God with clear conscience. The blood of Christ so completely covers our sin and removes our guilt that our consciences can be at peace - not because we are sinless and perfect, and not because we are not convicted in our conscience of sin when we fall short, but because when we do sin and our conscience does accuse us, we repent and grieve over our sin and hate it, and we also know that we have a Savior, Jesus Christ, who shed His blood for me, who bore my sin and who covers my transgressions, who because He is righteous has made me righteous, who washed me and made me whole and clean before God the Father and who has given to me newness of life, a life transformed by the Holy Spirit, of which my baptism – bodies washed with pure water – is a beautiful picture. All of us in Christ can trust this to be true. We have been united to Christ and so God commands us – draw near ***with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.***

We must draw near to God and we must come like this into God's presence with confidence, with a true heart, with full assurance, with our hearts sprinkled and bodies washed, fully immersed in the truth of the gospel. To approach God without confidence is dishonoring to Him and dishonoring to Christ. Is Christ's sacrifice not sufficient? Is God's love not inviting? Is his grace not greater than our sin? Beloved, God is glorified with we desire His presence, when we desire to commune with Him. The great gift of God's love is access to God Himself. Do not treat as common, do not treat with contempt, this invitation to draw near to God through Christ. Draw near. Then, in light of all that Christ has done...

2) ***“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.” (Hebrews 10:23, ESV)*** To “hold fast” communicates the idea of guarding or keeping something, of holding to something without bending no matter the pressure and no matter the cost. The writer of Hebrews is commanding us to hold fast to the confession of our hope and the confession of our hope for eternal life is Jesus Christ. He is telling us – hold on, don't give up, don't quit, don't waver, don't walk away, but persevere, be faithful, persist and endure on the path you have entered, following and worshipping Christ.

Don't turn back from your great hope. The true believer is the one who keeps on believing, the one who continues hoping in Christ, who continues trusting in the promises of God – promises of eternal life, forgiveness of sins, never to leave or forsake you, to present you blameless and perfect before Him, to bless you and to keep you, to make all things work together for your good, promises of sufficient grace, to supply your every need and on and on. It is in Christ and by His grace that we have received these precious and very great promises of God. ***“For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.” (2 Corinthians 1:20, ESV)***

All of the blessings of God are ours in Christ, we need look nowhere else. The true Christian is the one who confesses this truth with lips and life and who holds fast to Christ despite persecution, despite the pressure of this world to abandon Christ and conform to its godlessness. We confess our hope every time we worship – privately or publically. Every time we bow our knees in private, pour out our hearts in prayer, seek His face in the Word of God, submit ourselves to His commands with gladness, seek His wisdom – we are confessing our hope in Christ. Every time we gather to worship God together, to corporately express our praise, to magnify His worth, to pray to Him, to serve Him, to hear from Him His Word preached with faith, we are confessing our hope in Christ. Every time we choose

righteousness over sin, spiritual discipline and self control over selfish ambition, love over malice, forgiveness over spite, reconciliation over estrangement, repentance over hardening of heart, humility over pride, obedience over disobedience – these are all acts of worship and are all confessions of our hope – not for this life only but of the life to come, the eternal joys that await us. We have to fight to hold fast to Christ to remain faithful to Him. And that is why this third command is so important.

3) “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (Hebrews 10:24–25, ESV) The writer of Hebrews knows the fight involved in faithfully worshipping Christ. He knows we cannot do this alone and so he calls us to express our love toward Christ and toward one another by considering how it is that we can stir up one another – literally the word is incite – to fire up one another to loving God more, to loving one another, to doing good works in keeping with love for God and for others – to help make the profession of faith in Christ the defining characteristic of our lives - - everything from faithfulness and obedience, to preaching, to using spiritual gifts, to faithful giving, to loving your wife or loving your husband, to working as for the Lord – the list is endless. We must be continually stirring up one another to lives of worship.

That takes effort. To consider means to place your mind on something – on the spiritual needs of your brothers and sisters. That means this. If I have offered to God heart-felt praise and adoration, but I have failed to encourage and spur on my brothers and sisters, I have left part of worship undone. Consider how you can make your conversation edifying. Consider how you can demonstrate Christ’s love to a brother or sister, and be ready to sacrifice your money and time to make it happen. Consider how you can motivate a brother or sister to serve God. There is no specific “to do” list here. It’s up to each of us to use our minds wisely to consider how to stir up other church members to love and good deeds.

But beloved, listen to me. The overwhelming testimony of Scripture is that thriving and strong and flourishing faith depends on Christians deliberately and thoughtfully encouraging and edifying one another and stirring one another up to love and good works. We need one another to persevere and to stay strong in the faith. Without deliberate and purposeful fellowship with one another, it is altogether too easy for us to wander from Christ, to lose our passion and fire for God and His gospel, and to become hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

This stirring up one another doesn't happen by chance. In fact, the direct application of this command is the need to meet together as the people of God -- ***not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*** The author of Hebrews here is saying that we need to love God and love one another so much that we make gathering together for the sake of worship, for the studying the word, of lifting up prayer to God, and engaging in mutual and shared life the greatest priority. Corporate worship is that important – it must be the chief priority of our lives. The Father has sought us out, and gathered us together for this purpose, that we might worship Him. The goal of our salvation, the purpose of our weekly fellowship, and the eternal destiny of all the chosen in Christ, is to worship God in heaven. Let us never be guilty of taking this lightly. There is great encouragement in singing together and worshipping together, in listening to the Word of God proclaimed together, in pouring out ourselves in service together that is faith building and soul stirring – that cannot be found in any other way. We must worship together on the Sabbath. That's a non-negotiable and it is amazing to me how some people treat it as optional.

But, as important as corporate worship on a Sunday is, it is not enough. To meet together and to encourage one another requires more than that. We need to make time as the people of God to be together and to be purposely devoting time to prayer and encouragement regarding the sermon, to applying the Word of God to one another and encouraging and spurring one another on to love and good works. It is the kind of thing that takes place in our small groups that meet in different houses to encourage one another with the promises of God and exhort one another in love for Christ and holiness and faithfulness to God's word. It is what needs to be taking place before the services and after the services. It requires of us investment of time, phone calls, e-mails, texts, sharing meals together, intercessory prayer, visits, and personal, non-superficial conversations, sitting with someone you don't know in church, having people over to your house for a bible study, going out of your way for the sake of others. We cannot fulfill this command by simply ducking in and out of worship services but by real investment in one another.

But just like it is in our on age, even early in the history of the church, the habit of some was to neglect meeting together. The word that is translated as “neglecting” is a word that means to forsake, abandon, or desert. Do you see the weight of this? Neglecting to meet together is desertion of the church, desertion of the bride of Christ. Withdrawing from

corporate worship, avoiding personal and invested relationships with other believers, just drifting away is abandoning the bride and body of Christ and this neglect can be habit forming and it is not small and insignificant; it is sinful and spiritually deadly. If as a sheep, you separate yourself from invested life in the flock of God, and make a habit of missing corporate worship, you weaken yourself and you weaken the church and it's is only a matter of time before some wolf picks you off or one of the sheep that you should have been ministering to.

God chose to design the church to be a means of grace to keep you strong, to keep you devoted to Him. God placed you into a body of believers in order that you would be encouraged and exhorted. That is what God has designed for your good and for His glory. We need one another. What I need today are brothers and sisters, a company of the faithful, to come alongside me and say, "Nick, let's run the race together. Let's pursue Christ and draw near to God together. Let's hold fast to Christ together. I'll pray for you, you pray for me. Search my heart with me and I'll search your heart with you." It is what I need and it is what you need too. This is what we all need. This is encouraging one another. This is how we survive and thrive until the day of His coming.

For that to take place, we must reject the temptation to view the church and church services like consumers or spectators. We need to stop thinking about these times simply in terms of what we get out of it – how we are fed, or what we receive, how we have been served or inspired, or if it was good for us, but also to start thinking in terms of whether we had a part in spurring someone else on to love an good works and whether God was pleased with the way we blessed someone else.

Oh beloved – this is how we must live! This is what we were made for – to draw near to God through Christ, to hold fast to Jesus Christ as Lord, and to stir up one another to greater and greater degrees of love and to good works. Everything else is just details. In view of all that has been accomplished for us in Christ, let us confidently and steadfastly approach the throne of God to worship, and let each of us consider how to encourage one another to love and good deeds, because the Day we long for, the bodily appearance of Jesus from heaven, will soon be here.

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