

How should we think about Worship

by Fred Tomlinson

This sermon delves into the profound aspects of worship, exploring the heavenly perspective of worship as seen in Revelation 4, the spiritual reality of worship as experienced in Hebrews 12, and the intimate worship relationship between Jesus and the Father as revealed in 1 John 2. It emphasizes the importance of genuine, spirit-led worship that transcends earthly boundaries and echoes the heavenly worship of God.

Duration: 1:10:25

Scripture: Revelation 4:2, Hebrews 12:22, Hebrews 2:10

Topics: "Heavenly Worship", "Spirit-led Worship"

Description

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Transcript

Well, if you would like to take your Bibles, please turn with me to the book of Revelation and to the fourth chapter, Revelation chapter 4. I don't have a passage of Scripture which will occupy the entire time this morning, but I will just dip into several different sections of Scripture as you will discover. And trust that the Lord will be able to speak to each one of our hearts exactly that which he wants to say and needs to say to us individually. So I'm reading the first four verses of this chapter, Revelation chapter 4. After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven.

And the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things. Immediately I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and one sitting on the throne. And he who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance.

And there was a rainbow around the throne like an emerald in appearance. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed with white garments and golden crowns on their heads. Amen.

The title, if you will, the theme that I would like to speak around is around this question. How should we think about worship? How should we think about worship? Many of you know that I was raised in a

conservative evangelical home, and the name under which our assembly gathered at that time was the Plymouth Brethren. And I've said this many times before, I'll say it again, but I am very grateful to God for that background.

Among the features that were so important to the teaching in the assembly was the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And there was such a passion and desire to give him the proper place, the place that Holy Scripture gives to him, and that he should be recognized for who he was and indeed who he is at this point in time. And I'm grateful for that because in so many ways, although I may have adjusted my thinking about some things that I was taught in those days, this great fact and others also that were very much a part of the ministry have established a foundation for me in my heart and in my faith in God.

They also imparted to me a passion for the scriptures themselves and inspired me with other young people that I was part of in those days with a desire to read and indeed to memorize passages of scripture. And again, all that was very important to me. Having said that, when I was in my middle twenties, as a result of a number of circumstances which I will not describe, I found myself in a gathering of men and women who loved the Lord with a passion and among whom the Spirit of God was moving.

And it was in those early meetings, I'm looking back to 1966, it was at that time and in those meetings where I became aware of a level of worship for God that I had not known before that time. And that adjusted the direction of my life in many ways. And as the next few years moved on, I then found myself in a conference.

It was actually an elders conference in Devon in the UK. And I was there with other men. There were 66 of us all together.

I remember that number for some reason. And we spent three days together at the Roura Christian Fellowship, as it's now known. We were in a building outside of the main buildings of the house and so on.

We were in an area which was then known almost affectionately as the Hut. It's been demolished since then. But it was in that Hut, meeting with that group of men in those days, that my understanding and my experience of worship was elevated to a new level.

And I can't take time, or is it my intention to take time to describe the various things that were part and parcel of those days. Perhaps I'll just pause long enough to say that there were some young people who were part of the household, who had to do with chores and whatnot in the property. And I'm now related to one of those then young people who is now part of the same family as a result of my daughter's marriage.

But I know from him directly that a group of those young people, when they heard the men worshipping, they left their chores and came outside of the main building and came and were peering through the windows because they wanted to see what was happening and hear the men there as they were worshipping God. And I'm very grateful for that indeed. And in those next years there were other events that I could take more time to talk about.

I'm thinking of some conferences that I was part of where during the corporate worship, the worship was so holy and so strong, if I may use that word to describe worship, that Satan himself, demonic spirits were actually uncloaked in that huge gathering and were manifesting themselves. They're stirred up in the context of holy worship of holy God. And praise God for that.

I never became really part of the so-called charismatic movement. But clearly I was impacted personally by the life-transforming power of God, the Holy Spirit. And memories of those early days have been etched into my memory and will be there till my dying day, I'm sure.

Because they were the days when God was opening something up to me that was brand new and life-transforming and indeed set a course and a trajectory for my life and what would end up becoming a ministry. I never assumed such a thing would happen back in those days, but there you have the fact. My purpose here this morning in sharing these things is not just to tell stories.

But I want to emphasize to you that spiritual God-inspiring worship is not something that is static. Worship is not static because the God whom we worship is not static. That is so far as His moving in our lives is concerned.

For every one of us, wherever we are on this journey of faith, there's always, as I quote from the Old Testament, there's always very much more land to be possessed. And it must be one of the great tragedies within the Christian community that so many people have an initial experience. And it may have altered or transformed the course of their lives at that point in time, but so far as the depth and understanding and experience of God is concerned, they stall very quickly.

And the inevitable result of that is we become religious. We become set in the particular form that was somehow part of that initial experience. And we lose all sight of the fact that God is moving on.

He wants to move us on and change us from glory to glory and continue to reveal Himself to us ever more clearly. And as a result of that, completely alter and change what is our worship of Him. I suppose a further comment regarding that progression that God intends us to be making is simply this, that this progress that God has ordained to be our experience becomes stalled primarily when we are not prepared to leave what we've already experienced, whatever that may apply to.

To move on in the things of God inevitably presupposes that there will be that which we are leaving. Sadly, we find a kind of security in what we have experienced and who we are at that time. And we never allow God to break us out of that form and move us on into deeper and richer things.

Some folk who know me very well and have listened to me a lot over the years will have heard so many of my stories. But as I'm saying this, I'm thinking of a woman who has gone to glory now, but she was a very precious relative of mine. And she also was part of the Brethren Movement.

And when God began to change my heart and my understanding about spiritual things, I was anxious to share it with other people and I was attempting to share this with her. And her response, very sadly, was this. And this is a verbatim quote which I've repeated several times, so it's there in my mind, clear.

She said, Fred, if what I have was good enough for Bill Kendrick, it's good enough for me. Bill Kendrick was one of the elders in the assembly and a very lovely and wonderful man of God, I'm sure. But right there lies the kind of snare that we find ourselves facing where we reach a stage, wherever that is, whether it's early in the journey or midway in the journey, we reach a stage where we just dig in and settle down.

And this is an issue that's a very real issue for those of us who are older, of course, to whom change comes very much more reluctantly. And that, of course, comes at a great price. If we're going to follow through the opening question, how should we think about worship? I think the first and most important

thing is that we should have some sense of its importance.

And many of us, probably most of us here, were not brought up in this particular branch of the Christian church. But I went to a church of England or an Anglican school. That was my first school.

And on church holidays, our school was attached to a church. So we went to the Anglican church and were in their meetings. And I became aware of the Westminster Catechism, something which was written in 1647, as a matter of fact.

And I could talk more about catechisms, but I shall not do that. But one of the features of a catechism is that it's presented in the form of questions and answers. And the minister may ask a question.

These are doctrinal questions. And there are set replies which are prescribed in the catechism, which the congregation give. They respond to the question offered by the leader and so on.

And here is one of them. The question is, what is the chief end of man? And the congregation would respond and say, man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Think about that.

This is exactly why the catechisms were ever put together, to indoctrinate the members of the churches on the fundamentals of Christian doctrine, as understood by those who drew up the catechisms. Man's chief end, your chief end, is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Rightful worship of God will always be according to his word, according to the Scriptures, according to the word of God.

And we know that as we look back, all the way back in the Bible, that as God created that area known as Eden, he did that for a very special purpose. And we know also that God himself came into that garden. In fact, you will find, although it's not in the opening part of the Bible, it's all the way up in Ezekiel chapter 28 actually, you'll find that the garden is referred to as the garden of God.

There's another reference that refers to the garden of Eden as the mountain of God. And God came there and we know that God formed man. It's interesting because if we read carefully, God created man somewhere, because the next statement I find is he brought him to the garden.

He brought him and he placed him in paradise. And we believe that God's intention at that point was that man should glorify God. This is why God created him.

And the glorifying of God is another way of describing worship, that he may be a worshipper of God. And I believe we could say that God's intention was that he, who was established, although it doesn't specify this specifically, but clearly there's an implied fact, I think, that his function was priestly in the original intent. He would have responsibility for others who would come and indeed for all of creation.

He was, in a sense, he was ordained to be the worship leader in that context, that all creation should worship the God that he himself was worshipping as the head who was formally established and so on. And what we do know is that Adam, of course, fell desperately because based on temptation that came to him, he turned his preoccupation and his worship of God in on himself. He became self-pleasing.

He did what he wanted to do. It's interesting, isn't it, as we remind ourselves how in the process of time we're all descendants of the first Adam. And today we talk about the me generation.

Well, me first. It's all about ourselves. It's somehow inbred into us to be taken up with and preoccupied with ourselves, which if we track it all the way back, it was the original issue.

But I'm thinking of this in the context of worship. He turned his focus away from worshipping God to worship himself. He made himself as though he was God and disregarded what God had said and so on.

Such was the situation in the original garden and that which developed from it. But we believe that within the context of the church today, the church of Jesus Christ, that God's intent is that within the church and from the church, God should be worshipped. And I believe this is God's intent as we're gathering.

We're asking ourselves again, how should we think about worship? Well, we should think about worship as being of preeminent value and importance so far as God is concerned because it is an expression of the worship of God. And he has designed that he should be the one who is worshipped exclusively. It is, I believe, that is worship, the worship of God.

It's the highest peak of what we could call perhaps Christian activity. It is the Mount Everest. It's the highest of all peaks.

It's the highest function or activity in which a man or woman can engage themselves. That's how important it is. There is nothing more important at all.

There's nothing higher than it, the worship of God. Nothing higher than it and there's nothing that comes even close to it. It is separate from every other activity that we may engage ourselves in.

With those things said and with that kind of picture broadly painted before us, it comes as a heartbreaking tragedy that a man who was a man of God, A. W. Tozer, not known to any of us, I guess, but known so far as his writings are concerned and we appreciate his writings, but the tragedy is that this man of God would have a need or have a basis for making this statement. He said that worship is the missing jewel of evangelicalism. What a complete contradiction and I'm saying again, it's the supreme tragedy.

I'm sure that something which we're saying already is the most important issue in the whole of the life of a Christian man or the Christian church should be found missing. The jewel is gone. In making that statement and sort of publishing it again, me publishing it again this morning, that statement of Tozer's, I am well aware that there will be a whole chorus of objectors who will rise up in opposition to that statement and they say that is a crazy statement to make.

That the jewel of worship is missing from modern evangelicalism. It would be said that this is a crazy and foolish statement against the backdrop of the huge presence of Christian worship music today and someone is going to say this Christian worship music, let's face it, it occupies this huge place in our culture. How can you say that this jewel is missing? Look around you.

But the fact of the matter is, I believe, that the members of the evangelical community have naively allowed themselves to be seduced into a position of deceit I believe that this holy worship of holy God has been hijacked by business-minded men and women, I'm sure, who have recognized that this Christian music is a perfect business model in order to make money. And I have read that Christian music is the fastest growing area in recorded music in history. Christian music, the fastest growing area in recorded ministry in history with sales rising more than a half billion dollars annually in the US making multi-millionaires out of many of these celebrity performers that are watching them and listening to them.

One of whom reportedly said, I just want to make entertainment more worshipful. What a bizarre statement in the light of Holy Scripture. I just want to make entertainment more worshipful.

I'm well aware that there are some widely differing opinions about this aspect of ministry that I'm referring to right now and it doesn't fall to me today to somehow tease out the anomalies or whatever and however we may think of this and so on. Maybe there is a place on another occasion to do that but in making these statements in this broader context of what I'm sharing this morning, I refuse to ignore the one who once cried out and said take these things hence and make not my father's house a house of merchandise. I have to deal with that.

And the end doesn't justify the means because people will be pointing me to the end. But the end doesn't justify the means if the means have been carried out in contradiction to the inspired word of God and the clear teaching of Scripture and to the very words of Jesus himself on this occasion. We should think about worship.

We need to think about worship. I don't know whether this has been your experience. I confess to you it's been my experience more times than I could count and that is when I'm driving my car, at some stage in my driving, I might be in town just here and I might have arrived down somewhere onto Marshall Road and I'll realize I've just gone through two roundabouts and I can't remember anything that happened on those two roundabouts.

But at least I'm safely here at Marshall Road and so on. We become preoccupied with other issues and we do so much just in sort of a routine way and we're not really concentrating on all that's happening. I suppose to a degree we are subconsciously, but there you are.

I fear that the very same thing is possibly happening to us, perhaps to all of us, and perhaps to all of us in this very area of worship where we've been brought up a certain way, to think a certain way, whether that was in some sort of ancient conservative church setting or whether in some modern hyped sort of church setting. Excuse my description if I need to be. But the fact of the matter is we can just continue through our days because we're preoccupied with a dozen or more other things.

We don't pause long enough to ask ourselves some real questions in the light of the Word of God. The fact is if you are claiming to be a child of God, then you should be anxious to have answers to these questions and to be able to have a clear, thought-through, biblically-based response to these questions. Surely about this which we have reminded ourselves is the most important feature of our whole lives and of our whole Christian lives at that and so on.

So we're talking about something that's very, very important to us. And I think we need to invite the Holy Spirit, very positively, thoughtfully, and invite Him to speak to us and assist us to engage in the kind of thinking that is helpful. It was a man many years ago who I heard make this statement.

He said, There's nothing like good, solid thinking in the hands of the Holy Spirit. We're not just saying I need to think this through for myself, but we need to come aside and say, Lord, teach me, Lord. I'm making myself as though we're a blank sheet here.

I want you to write on my paper here. I want you to write into my heart and into my mind an understanding. What is your will? Specifically, what is the kind of worship that you're looking for? See, if we're going to say, we're asking how we should think about worship, I think that presupposes a couple of other questions.

One of them would be this. In making that statement, are we saying, Is there a right way to worship? Well, my answer is absolutely yes. To do that, I'm turning to another passage of Scripture in John's Gospel.

If you want to turn with me, please do, but I'm in John's Gospel. And I'm listening to Jesus speaking. I'm in chapter 4, and he's talking to the woman at the well, you will remember.

And breaking in on that, Jesus says to her in verse 22, You worship what you do not know. We worship what we know for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

For such people the Father seeks to be his worshippers. God is a spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. Amen.

Is there a right way to worship? Well, we couldn't have a plainer statement in answer to that question than the very words of Jesus here. He says that it's got to be spiritual worship, and it's got to be true worship, genuine, sincere, unmixed, pure, holy worship of holy God. The other question then would be, well, and I think it's implied by our answer to the first, is there a wrong way to worship? And the answer once again must be in the affirmative.

Yes, there's a wrong way to worship. There's a true way, and there's a false way. And if there is indeed a false way to worship God, who has prescribed the right way, that has to be a serious issue, and we need to think about it, and we need to examine their own hearts.

I think this factor is really highlighted in the passage of Scripture in the Old Testament, and I'm turning back into the book of Leviticus. You can turn with me, or I will read it to you. I'm going to read, first of all, in chapter 9, right toward the end of the chapter, verse 22.

And Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them. And he stepped down after making the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offering. And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting.

When they came out and blessed the people, the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. Then fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

When it says, from the presence of the Lord, clearly it's from the place upon the Ark of the Covenant, between the cherubim, where the Jewish people then would refer to the bright shining of his presence, the Shekinah glory. And it says that fire came out from that place. Fire came from God.

Fire came from heaven. And it consumed the offering which was on the altar. This was the initiation, of course, of the temple.

Wonderful. And we say, do we not, send the fire, Lord, send the fire, the fire that comes from heaven. But watch this as we read on in the very next chapter.

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. Amen.

When we say, send the fire, we need the fire. We want that fire to be the fire that comes forth from God's pleasure. And it's an expression of God's blessing and God's ministry to us, certainly.

But as we find this section here in chapter 10 that's so contrasting, and that reference to strange fire, in other words, the fire that would burn, permanently burn on the altar, because it must not be allowed to go out, we read, because it wasn't just fire that men created, it was the fire of God. There's a tremendous parallel here that we could develop thinking about our own lives in respect to this holy life, this holy fire, and the fact that it needs to be ongoing. But the fact of the matter is these two young priests, for whatever reasons, we don't know why, put it into their minds, but instead of following that prescription, they needed fire for the censers, for the incense burners, the fire pans, as they call them in this translation.

And it was God's plan that there wouldn't be some separate fire that they would create there, but they would use fire from the altar, the fire which God had given, the fire which would speak symbolically of himself and of his presence must be used. And they failed in that with disastrous results, as we know very well. And I think that highlights to my mind just how important things being right, our understanding being right according to God, according to Scripture, and our activities, whatever they are, the actual activity that those men were about to be engaged in was an activity which had been ordained of God for them.

But they went about it in the wrong way and God judged their folly in that dramatic way. And that must stand before all of us as those words of Jesus we quoted earlier about his father's house. Here we got another situation, it's not God speaking verbally, but it's God speaking in a very plain way, that everything must be done according to the pattern that was showed in the mount.

And so it is today and remains today. God's not looking for clever people. He's not looking for business people.

He's not looking for people who have convinced themselves they're doing what they're doing for good results. We need men and women who are rooted and grounded in the word of God who will only do that which God has prescribed and we will only do that in the way that God has prescribed for it to be done. I think also, you know, the way in which we worship, whoever we are, is the clearest indicator of our knowledge of God.

It's a giveaway. If I'm wrong about worship, I'm going to be wrong about God. And if I'm wrong about God, just to reverse it back, I'll be wrong about worship.

This is such an important factor. My intention, can I just say here, my intention is not to try and introduce or reintroduce some style of worship that comes from my ancient past. My desire is to point us to the scriptures of truth.

That's my intention and my purpose. For the remainder of my time, I want to turn our attention to three, I think, three passages of scripture. We can only do this quite briefly this morning, but I trust that the Lord will use what we will see to our great benefit.

Each of these three sections of scripture contain, within these brief readings, something which is staggering when we face it and consider it in the context of what we're talking about. And we will also find that which in each of them is instructive to us, which will help us if we're paying attention. We started out by reading from Revelation.

So this is the first section that I'm thinking about. You will have recognized, and I know some of you were with me a few weeks ago when we looked at this chapter on that occasion in more detail than we are this morning. But let me set the scene by reminding you that where we're going in our thinking and with the help of scripture, we're going into the church of the living God.

That's where we're going. Let me just qualify that just a little bit more. We're going into the church of the living God, how he sees it, and how he has ordained it to be.

With that in mind, if you were to write those things down and then spend a lot of time here in this section exploring it, I think that could be helpful. But that is indeed... I'm only going to drop down briefly on one or two things. First of all, let me tell you that a door has been opened for John and we're sort of with him on the basis of the fact that he's written these things down and they've been kept for us by the Spirit of God.

So in a sense, we're with him. We're going through the door that was opened into the church of the living God as God ordained it to be. And as we go in, the very first thing that I could say that's relevant is there is no stage.

I don't see a stage in this church. All I see is a throne. There's a throne.

And I know we looked at this in more detail those weeks ago, but I appreciate the way the text records this. There was a throne set in heaven. And that speaks very, very clearly to the fact that this is a permanent throne.

This is an immovable throne. This is an unshakable and an unyielding and an immutable throne. In other words, this throne is not going to be moved off to one side so that another event can take place of another kind.

This is set. The throne is set. This throne is not going to magically sort of disappear into the framework of the platform so that it's out of the way so that we can do whatever we want to do on the stage.

But it's not there. We're saying this is the ultimate pattern in the church as God ordained it to be from eternity past and it will be unchanging. And as we enter into it, there's a throne.

And enthroned upon the throne is this being. As I thought of this earlier, I thought of a phrase from one of Charles Wesley's hymns which is a priceless statement. As Wesley referred to God, the one sitting upon the throne, he said, See there the quickening cause of all.

Yes, this is who is seated upon the throne at the centre of the church of the living God. He who is the cause, the quickening cause of all, whose countenance is brighter than the sun at noonday. Amen.

Notice that in this church there's no dim mood lighting. There's no fake cloud or anything around here. Just the sheer glory of God.

Not man's imitation of it or his pretense to produce it. But it's the presence of the almighty God enthroned in glory. Amen.

There's not even any spotlight shining down onto this throne. They would be rendered foolish in the extreme because the light that illuminates everywhere in his church is coming from the throne itself. Not shining on it, but beaming out from it.

The very glory of God blazing from this eternal throne of God. And notice quickly the response of the congregation that's there. We find in verse 8 the angelic host, this innumerable company of angels, and their response is, Holy, holy, holy.

Notice the reference we read to the elders, which we could pursue more than I'm able to now this morning. But notice their response. The elder's gaze is fixed upon him who sits upon the throne.

And they live in his presence, these elders. And they worship him. Some of you will have heard me say that many years ago, decades ago, someone in a meeting I was in said that they'd been reading in some old English dictionary and they were looking up the word worship and were inspired when they saw that it was defined there in that dictionary as extravagant love.

Well, these elders are fixed in their gaze upon him who sits in the midst of the throne and their hearts are aflame with love for him and they're worshipping him extravagantly. This is how God intends worship to take place in his church. Not quietly, and we're not talking about noise or volume.

We're talking about hearts that are poured out positively and completely to God. And the whole redeemed company, this innumerable company of people who are gathered there in this setting, in this great church gathering, there's just one word that keeps reoccurring. You'll see it in this chapter and in the next chapter as well, and that is worthy.

You are worthy, they're saying. You are worthy because, and I'll just take half of a statement, because you have made us. You have made us.

You are worthy. And they're conscious as they look upon him still bearing the marks of the cross. They are there because he made them.

He made them. He made them worthy. And they are there.

Glory to God. Notice also, you have made us. Note this.

I think it's an important point. We don't hear anyone saying, you have made me. That's interesting.

Which takes me back to the prayer Jesus taught his disciples to say. When you pray, say, Our Father. He didn't say, when you say, My Father.

This is how I interpret that. When we're alone, we can say, My Father. Jesus said, My Father.

But in the context of the company, in the context of the church, we say, Our Father. We lose our individuality. In this context.

And I see that in this setting here, there's just an absence of individuality. No one, no one has the limelight. How far have we come? No one has the limelight.

He alone has the central place. Notice that in this context, no one is private. God is saving individual souls.

But it's a corporate bride that he's establishing for himself. No one is private. How completely different to today, for those of us who call ourselves the Lord's people.

How unlike so many aspects of our lives and our behavior do we find here. Well, someone's going to respond to me and say, Well, this is all very good, and that's wonderful, and we believe this, and this

clearly is the way things will be hereafter. This is heaven we're talking about.

But we're here on earth. We're not there yet. Which gives me reason to turn to my next passage of scripture.

And I'm going to the book of Hebrews, if you'd like to turn there with me. I'm in Hebrews chapter 12. Do you remember I told you that these three scriptures were staggering? I think you'll agree what we saw already in Revelation 4 and 5, although we didn't look into 5 exactly, was staggering in its wonder.

And it was instructive to us as we're there. The same applies here in this passage of scripture. This is staggering also.

Let me read it to you. We're breaking into a very important section. I'm sorry to do that, but nevertheless I'm in verse 18.

For you have not come. You have not come to a mountain that can be touched, and to a blazing fire, and to darkness, and gloom, and whirlwind. That's verse 18.

And to the blast of a trumpet, and the sound of words, which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. For if they could not bear the command, if even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned. And so terrible was the sight that Moses said, I am full of fear and trembling.

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to myriads of angels, and to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood which speaks better than the blood of Abel. Amen. That's an incredible section of Scripture.

There's a reason why the inspired writer is doing this that we can't explore, but we certainly see the contrast that we find here as he refers back to the old covenant situation and just how terrible it was and how condemning God's presence was and so forth and so on. And then just a verse change, although it wasn't in verses in those days when it was written, I'm sure. We come to verse 22.

But you have come. Note the tense there. He didn't say, but you are coming to heaven when you pass from this scene of time.

We're not doubting that. But that's not what he's saying here. He's writing to men and women who were living, living souls at that time, and he's sharing the truth of the word of God.

And he said, listen, you've not come to this situation that we're finding recorded in the Old Testament and in Old Testament history. He said, you're in an entirely different position because there's a new covenant. There's a new arrangement.

And he says, listen, this is part of it. And this is staggering as he goes on to say the things that we can't analyze today. But here we've come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God.

He says, we're there. Where do you live? This is God's plan and purpose for all of his people. This is to the, verse 23, the general assembly of the church of the firstborn ones, is the better translation of that.

In other words, everyone in this huge company in the church of Jesus Christ are in the firstborn. They're all firstborn. You say, well, they can't be all firstborn.

Well, no, but yes, yes. Yes, because he, Jesus, the Son of God was the firstborn. He's the firstborn among many brethren.

But as the many brethren have been born again of the Spirit of God in him, we are included in the firstborn. And the firstborn had blessings and inheritance which were never ours. They were only his.

But we're blessed with the blessings of God which are in Christ Jesus. We're included in this and so on. We've come into the very presence of God and so forth.

Please excuse me for not looking at it in greater detail here. It's staggering. What has the hymn writer done? Forgive me, the scripture writer, the book of Hebrews writer.

What has he done? He's blurred the margins. That's what he's done. You know, recently Sheila and I went a short distance from here.

And for those who are not from this area who may be listening to me, we live about half a mile from the United States border. And there's an actual crossing, not more, a little more than half a mile away. But then it's a unique situation because running across the 49th parallel at this section, there's just a ditch that divides this country of Canada from the United States.

We follow that because there are roads in our district that run parallel to the border. And at places, there's a road only a matter of feet away, but it's on the other side of the border in the United States and they run parallel for a little while. And normally, no one dare cross that section.

And there's pylons or whatever you would call them. I don't know what you call them. Every now and again, which indicate, as it's written on the side of it, Canada.

If you used to look on the other side, but you'd have poked your head into America to do it, it would say the United States. Well, of course, with the coronavirus and whatnot, the border here has been closed for traffic for ordinary people. And some of the people in the United States attend our church here in Canada.

But we're not allowed, of course, to have that privilege at this point in time. Having said that, a few weeks ago, it wasn't less than that, sorry, we were at that ditch area and we fellowshiped at the ditch with some of our brethren there. And as a matter of fact, when we arrived at the spot, because we had to be watching for their car, when we arrived at the spot, we could hardly see them.

And once I got closer, because they had their own picnic chairs, they'd actually trespassed into Canada. And they said, we've talked to the border man because there was a vehicle not far away and we're okay to do this. We couldn't pass things to one another, except it might be a sandwich.

You could do that apparently. But we were able to embrace one another and we were able to fellowship together. The margin, the border was blurred at that point, just at that point where we were not really in the United States, but we kind of were and so forth.

That's exactly what the writer is doing here when he says, you've come already to Mount Zion. You've come into the presence of God. You've come, you're actually in fellowship with the spirits of just men who've been made perfect.

We're fellowshiping together. There are those who are invisible to us. Some of them are my relatives.

Some of them are brethren I've loved dearly who I cannot see now because they've gone beyond that border. But there's another sense in which we're fellowshiping together around the same throne. Invisible to us, visible to them.

But we fellowship together and worship together because we're all part of the ekklesia, is the Greek word, the church. The ekklesia of Jesus Christ. We're part of the same body.

Glory to God. And we're calm. In the mind of God, it appears, we're already there.

It's part of that mystery which we can explore in different passages of scripture of now but not yet. The Apostle John uses that very expression. Now but not yet.

In other words, we're there. We're there at the border. They're at our border.

But they're not yet here in fellowship with us. There's a consummation of that which God has initiated us into that we're not yet experiencing as Christian men and Christian women. But we anticipate it and we already share in its joys.

And we could be reading in other passages. We could be reading in Ephesians, for example, in chapter 2 and verse 6 which tells us plainly that already we are seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Horatius Bonner wrote these words.

Some of you know them. Hear, O my Lord, I see thee face to face. This is at the blurring of the borders.

Hear, O my Lord, I see thee face to face. Here would I touch and handle things unseen. Here grasp with firmer hand the eternal grace and all my weariness upon thee lean.

And I know that that hymn was written around the breaking of bread and has a very special application to that particular event. But how wonderful. Okay.

Can I carry on a little further? Let's retreat then back into our own zone, into our own border. And we'll do that as we turn to the third passage which is a couple of pages on from here in the first epistle of John. First John in chapter 2. A couple of verses.

I'll read. I'm thinking... We are the sons of God. We are those who have been included in this great family of God.

And you know what? I'm going to turn to another passage which will help me even better, I think. I'm going back to Hebrews again. And I'll read from verse 10.

For it was fitting for him for whom are all things and through whom are all things in bringing many sons to glory to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father for which reason he is not ashamed to call them brethren saying, and this is a quote from the Old Testament I will proclaim your name to my brethren in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise and again I will put my trust in him and again behold I and the children whom God has given me. I told you that each of these passages was staggering and instructive.

I want you to see that this is a staggering statement here with this quotation here from the Old Testament which is being applied here and it's frequently helpful and instructive to us when we find an Old Testament passage quoted by the inspired writers in the New Testament to explore and consider the context and the particular way in which that statement is being applied and understood and how we should understand it. And so something which on the surface of things seems to be just some words that the psalmist said which had an application to him in a particular sense the Holy Spirit has taken and he's put them as it were right into the mouth of Jesus himself. This is not the only occasion when that happens of course but notice what's happening here I said we've come back across the border we're back in our assembly we're back in what we'll call our real world here and so on and we still think about this general assembly and church of the firstborn ones in each of these situations so we're looking as the writer speaks to those who are now in the family of God he refers to them as sons among the sons who are being brought to glory the sons who are being perfected through sufferings the sons who are being sanctified I'm looking at verse 11 and so on the sons who are so genuinely God's own sons that God is not ashamed to call us his brethren he's highlighting the genuineness of it all and then comes this quotation from the Old Testament I will proclaim your name to my brethren who's speaking? well it was the psalmist but not here this is Jesus speaking what are we finding? we're finding that the very presence of Jesus is among the church today the very presence of Jesus is here we could try to understand that a whole lot more than we are able just now and think about it how staggering this is the very spirit of Christ is here among us but then I'm reading on it says I will proclaim your name to my brethren he's already said we are his brethren we've established that this is Jesus speaking well then who is he speaking to? he's speaking to his father we've got Jesus by his spirit among the congregation and what's he doing? he's worshipping his father and first of all we hear this I'll declare, I'll proclaim, I'll preach if you like he's the preacher he's the real preacher if he's not preaching nothing's being said and what is he preaching? he's preaching about the father this is where worship comes from he said I'm going to preach you I'm going to proclaim you father among my brethren here that is purchased with his blood in the midst of the congregation listen to this I will sing your praise what a thought I don't know anything more staggering than this this is the word of scripture this is not what some bloke out there is telling me or someone else is doing this is the word of God and it's telling me here that the true church of Jesus Christ those who've been genuinely born again of the spirit of God are included they're integrated into the very life of God they are his brethren we're family he loves us his spirit is here among us and he's speaking to us he tells his father about his father and then we find him singing what's he singing? I talked a little earlier about the elders remember the elders we found in chapter 4 they were leaders elders are ordained to be leaders but they're only leaders by example and pity us when we go beyond that leaders by example and I want to suggest here that Jesus he is the ultimate worship leader within the church and he's worshipping his father he's not teaching us how to do anything we're just watching we're just listening we're just amazed and we find ourselves worshipping Amen you know it's time for me to close but I remember on numerous occasions going to the Epsom Fellowship in the south of England I've been privileged to speak there and some of you who may listen to me are either from that fellowship because I know people in England listen to these messages perhaps some of you even are members of that very fellowship but at that time Tony and Mary Seton were responsible for the church they've moved to a different location in England now but I will always remember how much I was blessed and inspired by listening as we worshipped as we sang together as we heard Mary Seton sing with a beautiful voice that God has graced her with and in her unique and inhibited way she would sing out harmonies as we sang through which so enhanced our singing it was such a pleasure certainly for people like me without anything like a decent voice in fact I'm losing it right now as I'm speaking to you but to hear that was such an enhancing thing and I want to ask you this morning is your inward ear tuned to hear the

sound of him among us as he worships his father that's the challenge it's not coming in and making as much noise as we can make or singing the familiar things or for that matter saying nothing and just being locked up in our own selves it's none of those things and thinking any of those features as a spiritual or religious true worship that father is seeking is for men and women who have surrendered their entire lives to the cleansing and redeeming blood of Christ who've allowed his Holy Spirit to come and fill their hearts and govern their lives and direct their steps and who come before him in brokenness and humility and in love with their ear cocked you know if we talk too much you'll always know whether people are listening or not because if we talk too much you can't hear him it's somehow be still and know that I am God I'm not, as I said earlier I'm not trying to promote any particular activity I'm saying this is the core issue we're at the very epicenter of the whole issue of worship and we're saying it has to do with seeing him who is invisible and hearing him in our hearts who for the most part is inaudible but so real and another hymn writer said and earth has ne'er so dear a spot as where I meet with thee we meet with him at the blurring of the margins as it were on the very edges in that thin veil that divides this world from the world to come but in a strange way already we're there in a strange way we're partaking of its fruits in a strange way we're tasting its powers in our lives in a strange way we're becoming aware increasingly aware of him who is our God may God help us to tune out all of the clatter of man's noise and tune our hearts to hear him may God succeed in reforming our worship and bringing us into the kind of worship that God has chosen for himself Amen Amen

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