

Scripture Reading: Micah 4: "1 Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. 2 Many nations shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the Word of Jehovah from erusalem. 3 He shall judge between many peoples, And rebuke strong nations afar off; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. 4 But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, And no one shall make them afraid; For the mouth of Jehovah of hosts has spoken.

'Forged by the Word of God'

In our third message on worship we come to the portion of the service we refer to as the consecration of God's people. This is perhaps the most familiar portion of the service, even if the word consecration is not:

- **So what does it mean for God's people to be consecrated?**

It means more than just being holy or set apart: It means being changed and prepared for service:

In a word you could say maturity!

- **So the text that I selected is intended to help us understand how serious what God does with us is at this point in our worship:**

Reflecting on our morning text:

-- How many are expecting the nations of the earth to start hammering those swords into plows any time soon?

-- How many of you think wars will cease?

Those are tough things to believe and yet this is the promise God has given: There will be real, tangible, and practical affects as the Kingdom of Jesus fills the whole earth under the influence of God's Spirit.

- **So how is that going to happen?**

God is going to use all those broken vessels who make up the Body of Christ, those sinners He has called together and cleaned up who are now being prepared & equiped to do His work!

- **And an important part of what we need to understand is how difficult that task really is!**

For God to transform us from rebels to faithful Saints is in some ways even tougher to imagine than those swords being pounded into plows.

- **You see, if most of the people in two nations are converted and changed, one should be able to begin imagining a cessation of war between them.**
- **It is changing the sinner that is really the tough part!**

That is why what happens here during our time of consecration is so critical and very practical: It is here where we become the living sacrifices the Apostle Paul commands us to be. I will only touch on the many images in the Old Testament which inform us about this time, helping us to see what is given to us in the Old Testament "through new eyes" as Jim Jordon would say.

[remind them about the study materials]

There are many sacrifices in the Old Testament with lots and lots of details, but there are three major sacrifices that can be related to the central elements of our Covenant Renewal Worship...

The writer of Hebrews reminds us that all of the Old Testament sacrifices and rituals pointed forward to what Jesus would do and all New Testament worship celebrates and applies what Jesus has done! When God called his people to the Temple, the first major sacrifice was the sin offering: Here the focus was on the death of the animal and blood. This is remembered during our time of confession where we hear the Good News that Jesus has paid the price for our sins as THE sacrificial Lamb and that we are forgiven!

- The second major offering was the burnt offering or what should more accurately be called the Ascension Offering.

There the focus was not on the death of the animal or its destruction, but rather on its transformation. The priests are given meticulous instructions about how the animal is to be brought near to God, properly divided and placed on the altar at which point it is transformed by fire into smoke that is taken up into the glory cloud of God as a sweet savor. The final offering is the peace offering which is where the Saint who is forgiven and changed can now sit and enjoy a meal with God which we will see next week is related to communion.

To properly understand the importance of consecration this week, we must be sure that we do not confuse the first two offerings. There is NO forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood and no one may attend the marriage feast without the proper wedding garment as we learned last week. In the ascension offering, the animal's death was not the focus, but rather how it was changed, or consecrated. Chapter four in Hebrews speaks about the Word of God being that sharp doubled edged sword that could divide between the bone and the marrow. The image of the Priests knife would certainly have come to mind to these Jewish listeners, as it should for us.

The animal is prepared by the Priest's knife and changed into smoke by the sacrificial fires.

- Keep in mind what changes those animals in the O.T.:
The knife & the fire...

And what changes us here in our worship service?

- The Word & the Spirit!

As we learned from our study of the Book of Acts, Jesus has ascended to God's right hand and sent the Holy Spirit to comfort and empower His bride who will now fill the earth with His Kingdom.

- With all of that in mind let's consider what is done during this time of consecration in the covenant renewal worship service.

After the absolution we lift up our song of thanks joining the hosts of heaven in singing the praises of our great God. In Revelation chapter five we are told that we sing a new song to the lamb: "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe & language & people & nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priest to our God, and they shall reign on earth."

Next, we read a portion of Scripture in unison or responsively as we begin the process of being instructed by God's Word...

But this is not just an academic class room like what we might find at a University or even a good Seminary. Here in the midst of God's renewal of His covenant, the Holy Spirit is going to use His Sword, the Word of God, to properly prepare us to be a sweet smelling savor before our Holy God and to serve in His Kingdom.

- I guess this is the point this week where we must again ask if we REALLY believe that this is what is happening to us?
- IF we do, it will change how we sing, how we read or listen, how we pray and how we give!

We see all of these things during this time of consecration and we must always learn to be more and more serious about what is taking place!

Here at Church of the King we focus on key passages that are instructive to the Saints and critical in our battle with the world today: For example we read the Law of God & the account of Creation on a regular basis.

- Then we sing a song of response & the minister reads the morning text and preaches the sermon.

This is perhaps the easiest place for some to slip into thinking they are just spectators... Nothing could be further from the truth IF we really do believe that the Holy Spirit is with us using the Word of God to reorder and change us! *[those animals were certainly not spectators!]*

- This is the practical portion of the service, not because I include the appropriate applications in my sermon, but rather because we believe that the Spirit uses all of this portion of the service to transform us!

This is truly where we are filled with the Spirit, or slain in the Spirit or moved by the Spirit: Experiences many charismatic churches often try to achieve in other ways today.

- Both Word & Spirit are central in Covenant Renewal Worship.

Not because everything points to the sermon, not because I got my three points, have a nice speaking voice or learned in seminary how to “move” people to make a decision...

- But because this is where the Spirit does His most extensive work to prepare us, to consecrate us for God’s service in this world.

This is again an important place for the instruction of our children: Not only in terms of what they will hear and understand, but in their learning to be attentive and participating. Edith Schaeffer would often draw illustrations with her children and grandchildren to help them focus and understand what was being said:

It can be as simple as training children to keep their attention focused on the pastor during this time of instruction. You will be amazed at how much even our young children will learn and we also try to keep them engaged with illustrations and/or questions they can understand... This is important because it also teaches the adults some of those critical lessons!

Obviously, many in our modern age are shocked to see our children present in the worship service... Especially a service that includes a long and detailed “adult” sermon!

Their presence is important because we really DO believe they are in covenant with God & members of the Body of Christ...

Their obedience here reflects proper training from their parents and yes, the rest of us can also learn lessons about patience as parents deal with the times of testing that always come!

And of course, here again, we must be the ones setting the good example as their parents or as their sponsors!

After the sermon we continue our worship with a song of response we reviews some of the Heidelberg Catechism and then read a passage of Scripture together focused on the importance of tithing and giving.

- This is not something we focus on because God needs the money!

Many churches downplay the offering not wanting to appear too materialistic and that removes a very practical and important part of our consecration. The giving of our tithe reminds us that ALL our increase comes from God's hand!

- The giving of special offerings reminds us that we are part of the Body of Christ & have an obligation to help those in need.

We are not giving because God or even the church has needs, but we give so that we understand how God blesses us with material things so that we can use them for the advance of His Kingdom!

It is much the same when we come to our time of prayer: We are not praying so that God will get the latest update on what is happening here at Church of the King or come to know our needs...

- We are praying because we are commanded to come before His throne boldly and learn to realize that the prayers of the Saints are a delight to God!

In the New Testament both giving and prayer are seen as extensions of the Old Testament sacrifices that pointed to the finished work of Jesus: Those sweet-smelling savors that go up before God like the smoke from those ascension offerings... & they are powerful indeed!

Revelation 8:3 "Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, & an earthquake."

- A powerful picture! One that should remind us of the importance of our prayers and why we should be praying along!

With both giving and praying, we again set the example for our children to follow:

- Do they see us as cheerful givers who are training them to do the same?
- Do they see us as faithful prayer warriors who are teaching them to be the same?

So what does all of this mean? What are we teaching and passing along to the generations to come? I have made the case that this is the practical part of the service...

- But how is it practical, what happens to us, what do we learn & how do we become properly equipped?
- Understanding our ascension and worship of God with our singing gives us the right focus for all of life...
- Learning as Paul declared to the Greeks at Athens, "In Him we move and have our being!"
- Our readings from the Scriptures and listening to the sermon brings knowledge & wisdom.

Here we learn the right ideas & lessons about how we are to live as those who trust & obey, those who love Jesus & keep His commandments...

- Can't do that if we don't know what they are!

- **Tithes & offerings focus on our wealth, great or small, the practical stuff of life that is often ignored in ‘spiritual’ circles!**

With the giving of our tithes & offerings in our time of consecration, we learn that God loves to bless His people and gives us the wealth and ability to serve in His Kingdom.

And finally our time of prayer reminds us where our true source of power lies as the God...

- **The God who made heaven and earth receives and hears our prayers and our lives as a sweet smelling aroma!**
- **Right worship gives us a right focus for all of life...**
- **God’s Word gives us knowledge & wisdom**
- **Tithes & Offerings remind us that wealth is a gift from God**
- **In prayer we see that true power comes only from the very throne of God...**

Thus we should understand more fully the importance of the conclusion that we come to after the long treatise on worship in Hebrews chapter 10:19 “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God,

22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Communion Meditation: Psalm 104

“He waters the hills from His upper chambers; The earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works.

14 He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the service of man, That he may bring forth food from the earth, 1

5 And wine that makes glad the heart of man, Oil to make his face shine,

And bread which strengthens man’s heart.”