

Hebrews 12 (18-29) – When Jesus Worships, pt.4

This is the fourth message where we have been examining what the book of Hebrews says about our worship as a local church body. And we have discovered that when we gather together to worship, even though we are physically on Earth, we are spiritually brought up into Heaven.

Transcendent worship is very clear in the book of Hebrews. And understanding this teaches you to move forward, instead of romanticizing the past. The point of the book of Hebrews is to demonstrate that Christ is superior to Moses (Hebrews 3:1-6), the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant (Hebrews 8:6-13), and New Testament worship is superior to Old Testament worship (Hebrews 12:18-29). Amen.

We are examining Hebrews 12:18-29 like an investigative journalist, using the time-honored method of asking the questions, who, what, when, where, why, and how. In our first message, we asked who, what, and when. Who is involved? All of God's kingdom. What is going on? Worship. When is this taking place? Anytime God's people on Earth gather for worship, they become part of that gathered assembly in Heaven.

Then, in our next message, we asked where. This transcendent gathering of all the saints, past and present, and all the angels, and God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, takes place in the throne room of Heaven. Because of Jesus our worship leader, when we gather together to worship, we enter into the Holy City, into the Holy Temple, inside the Holy Place, and in audience with our Holy God. We worship as part of the household of God. And all God's children are becoming God's house itself.

So that is who, what, when, and where. And in our last message, we began to answer the why? If you haven't yet heard those three prior messages, make sure you do, because they will help clarify and bring depth to this message. And today, we will continue to ask why? And then we will answer the final question, how. How can this transcendent worship take place?

Why is this taking place? In our last message, we examined Hebrews 3:1-6, and saw how Christ is superior to Moses. Moses was faithful as a servant of God. Jesus was faithful as the Son of God. Moses was pointing to the ministry of Christ. Jesus is the Christ. Moses was faithful to God and God's people. But Jesus is God and Jesus is the creator of God's people.

Jesus is the one who is your way to God. If you keep your eyes on him, you will have confidence that your sins are forgiven and you will persevere in faith and realize your heavenly calling. If you lack peace in your life, if you lack joy in your life, the answer is not about doing more for God. The answer is to *consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession*. Jesus is joy, and to focus on the Prince of Peace is the way to peace.

Now, that was last time. Today, we will examine Hebrews 8:6-13, and see how the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant.

The New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant (Hebrews 8:6-13) – Jesus is a greater mediator than Moses. And this passage says that the covenant Jesus mediates is greater than the covenant that Moses mediated. Vs.6 says that it is based on better promises. Vs.7 says that the Old Covenant was morally good, but it was powerless to save us. But this was the plan all along. This is why vs.8-12 quote Jeremiah 31:31-34, and say that Jesus has inaugurated the promised New Covenant. God will finally and fully forgive his people of their sins, and will write his law on their hearts.

The Old Covenant was for a specific people in a specific place and time. The New Covenant extends to all believers, in all times, for all time, and forever. The Old Covenant promises were based on the obedience of God's people. The New Covenant promises are based on the obedience of God's Son. And the New Covenant promises are about more than land, and earthly blessings, they are about spiritual blessings and eternal life.

Hebrews 9:15, speaking of Jesus and his people, says – *Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised*

eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

Christianity is better than Judaism in every way. Now, to be clear, the Old Covenant saints were also saved by God's grace, even though they lived prior to the inauguration of the New Covenant. But they were redeemed by Jesus alone, although their understanding of this was less than ours. As the book of Hebrews so clearly proclaims, those Old Testament saints were looking forward to a Messiah, who would lead them to an eternal city.

Hebrews 11:14-16 says – *These all died in faith (Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob), not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.* Hebrews 13:14 says – *For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.* Those old saints have found the heavenly city. And when we gather for corporate worship, we find it, too.

It is good and right to understand how the Old Covenant points us to the New Covenant and Christ. But the old types and shadows cannot save. And they cannot give the power to obey. The old system of sacrifices was meant to point to the once for all sacrifice of Christ. As Hebrews 10:1 says – *For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.* And as Hebrews 10:14 says – *For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.*

There is no reason to go back to the Old Covenant ways. Some people want more ritual and rules and pageantry and spectacle, like we see in Old Testament life and worship. But the mystery of New Covenant worship is far greater than the types and shadows of the Old Covenant.

Genuine New Testament worship, in spirit and truth, is meant to lift our hearts to God, and our minds into the awesome scene of worship in his presence. This is not a feeling of closeness, or something suited to our personal preference, as if we are speaking of God coming down to us in a personal way. Rather, this is an acknowledgment of transcendence. Of majesty. Of holiness. Of eternity. We have been transported into another realm. It is the mystery of true worship that we enter another world. And we're given a taste of Heaven on Earth. And what eternity will be like.

To return to or rely on the Old Covenant rules and rituals is to deny the power and priority of the New Covenant. It denies Jesus Christ, who came to fulfill the Law for us. This is why vs.13 says – *In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete.* And to think that the Old Testament style of worship was superior, and more sanctified, and more sanctifying than the New Testament pattern of worship is to deny the point, the power, and the promise of Hebrews 12:18-29.

New Testament worship is superior to Old Testament worship (Hebrews 12:18-29). Vs.18-21 are pointing to the events of Exodus 19-20. Look at vs.18 – *For you have not come to what may be touched.* This is speaking of Mt. Sinai, when the people received the Ten Commandments. It was an incredible sight and experience. But they were not allowed to draw near to that mountain. It was spectacular. But the people were in great fear of it all. And as vs.21 says – *Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear."*

Now look at vs.22-24 – *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.* Now, instead of all that incredible, physical spectacle, we have been brought into something greater. Because of Jesus our worship leader, when we gather together to worship, we enter into the Holy City, into the Holy Temple, inside the Holy Place, and in audience with our Holy God. This transcendent gathering of all the saints, past and present, and all the angels, and God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, takes place in the throne room of Heaven. And as Hebrews continually tells us, now we can draw near, without fear.

You may want some sort of physical, tangible, extraordinary feeling when you worship. And you might think of all the sights and sounds of the Bible days gone by. But don't dismiss what this passage says about the spiritual reality of our worship right now. And what Jesus says about worship now.

To see that, let's turn to the gospel of John, chapter 4, and vs.19-24. Jesus is talking to a Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well. The woman wanted to know the place where the true worship was happening. The Samaritans and Jews had rival temples, one on Mt. Gerizim and one at Jerusalem. And both the Samaritans and Jews believed their place was the right place of worship.

Look how Jesus answers her question. In vs.21, Jesus says that a change is coming. Now, in vs.22, Jesus does tell the Samaritan woman that the Temple in Jerusalem was where he was to be worshiped. However, as Jesus says in vs.23-24, this will no longer matter. Soon, the true worshipers of God will no longer worship at the Temple in Jerusalem. Instead of worshiping at the physical Temple, true worshipers will worship in spirit and truth.

The change and difference between Old Testament and New Testament worship is about the person and work of Christ. True worshipers no longer worship at the earthly copy of the real Temple. Rather, they now worship God at the real Temple itself! We walk by faith, not by sight. In spirit and truth; this is what God says is happening when we worship today as a corporate body. That's what is acceptable to the one true God. And as Hebrews 12:25 says – *See that you do not refuse him who is speaking.*

So, we have answered the who, what, when, where, and why of New Testament worship as pictured in Hebrews 12:18-29. The final question to answer is how. How can we physically gather together to worship on Earth, and yet be spiritually brought up into Heaven?

How is this taking place? The Old Testament prophesied of the power of the New Covenant and transcendent worship in Ezekiel 36:26-27, which gives us our answer. *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within*

you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

How can you be united to God, and to other believers? How can you be empowered to obey? How can you be physically on Earth, and yet be spiritually brought up into Heaven? By the power of the Holy Spirit, through your union with Christ, which means we are all united to each other, as we are all seated with Christ at the right hand of God. And by the indwelling Holy Spirit, when we gather together to worship, we enter into the Holy City, into the Holy Temple, inside the Holy Place, and in audience with our Holy God. With Jesus, our Great High Priest and worship leader. Now you can draw near, without fear. Now you can find a fullness of joy. Now you can marvel at the Prince of Peace, and behold the glory of the Lord, and be transformed into the image of Christ, from one degree of glory to another. Now your worship doesn't have to be confused. You don't have to wonder if God is with you. You don't need to wait on some obvious sign, or chase after some wonder. You don't need to go to some special place or special conference or special religious site. You don't need to travel to the Middle East to worship or experience the presence of God. You can be in the wonder of it all, the throne room of Heaven, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Look at vs.26-27. Back in the days of Moses, God shook the mountain, and the people feared. But now, God is going to shake everything. And only the unshakable will remain. Then you will know that all is well in God's unshakable kingdom. And as vs.28-29 say – *Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.*

If you want to be a true worshiper, you need to come to Jesus in faith and he will give you his Spirit, and place you in God's true temple. Then you will have direct access to the Father, you will be able to boldly come before the throne of grace to find mercy and grace when you need it, and you will be lifted up with you brothers and sisters to worship in spirit and truth. Amen.