

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, & let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, & we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the Word of Jehovah from Jerusalem. 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. 5 For all people walk each in the name of his god, but we will walk in the name of Jehovah our God Forever and ever. 6 "In that day," says Jehovah, "I will assemble the lame, I will gather the outcast and those whom I have afflicted; 7 I will make the lame a remnant, And the outcast a strong nation; So Jehovah will reign over them in Mount Zion From now on, even forever...11 Now also many nations have gathered against you, who say, "Let her be defiled, & let our eye look upon Zion." 12 But they do not know the thoughts of Jehovah, Nor do they understand His counsel; For He will gather them like sheaves to the threshing floor. 13 "Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion; for I will make your horn iron, and I will make your hooves bronze; You shall beat in pieces many peoples; I will consecrate their gain to Jehovah, and their substance to the Lord of the whole earth.""

"Consecrated by God"

We come this morning to the third message in our series on covenant renewal worship:

- We will study the portion of the service we refer to as the consecration of God's people.

This is perhaps the most familiar part of the service, even if the word is not, & is certainly the most universal practice among American evangelical & reformed churches today.

- In almost all services; you will find singing, preaching, offerings and prayers being done each week

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 & prepared for service:

- It is where God changes us & sanctifies us or makes us mature.

Before we look at the details of our consecration, I want to point out that I have included some study sheets at the end of the orders of worship which can also be found on our web site under our worship. [www.cotks.org] When we see how God deals covenantally with His people we will realize how richly the Old Testament informs us about right worship in the New Covenant.

We see this pattern in many of the major events of the Bible, and in how our salvation is presented in the New. In the chart you will see the general covenant pattern in the left-hand column:

- First God takes hold of something or someone to establish a covenant.
- Next God changes or reorders them.
- God speaks to them & instructs them.
- God confirms His covenant with signs and oaths [often with food!]
- God looks to the future, revealing the purpose of His Covenant.

Hopefully this series of sermons will help us better understand how Covenant Renewal Worship takes us through this covenantal pattern each week:

- In the call to worship, God takes hold of us.**
- In our time of confession & absolution God reorders us by removing our sins as far as the east is from the west and clothing us in the white robes of righteousness in His Son Jesus.**
- During the time of consecration God instructs us from His Word and accepts our praises, prayers, and gifts.**
- Next those who have been given the sign of Baptism are gathered around the great covenant meal where we are nourished by God Himself.**
- And finally God looks to the future by sending us forth to serve in His Kingdom!**

Using this chart and these messages I hope we can all study how this clearly parallels what Jesus has done in coming to save His people from their sins and also how the Old Testament patterns showed the way:

Old Testament worship looked forward to what Jesus would do:

- New covenant worship remembers and celebrates what Jesus has done for His people!**
- ALL worship by God's people has centered on God and His covenant with His people!**

So our time of consecration is where God changes us or sanctifies us.

- The text that I selected is intended to help us understand how serious what God does with us at this point really is: 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, the sinners that He calls in and cleans up to do this work!

- And part of what we need to understand is how difficult that first 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.

- However, if most of the people in two nations are converted and changed by God's Word, one should be able to begin imagining a cessation of war between them.**

It is changing the sinner that is tough, and so we should think again of that image the Prophet Ezekiel was given of the valley of dry bones. We have been saved by the finished work of Jesus who came to save His people, the dry bones, from their sins:

- We have been brought back to life, the first resurrection that is referenced in chapter 20 of the Book of Revelation.**
- But just as God showed the Prophet Ezekiel with those bones coming to life, now we need muscle and blood and flesh and breathe to be fully restored and that is the work of Sanctification by the Spirit.**

Another way to think about the movement of God's renewal is that He calls us together and cleans us up with the call to worship and confession and absolution.

After our time of consecration we are nourished at the table and sent back out to serve in the world.

It is what happens here during our time of consecration that is critical and very practical: It is here where we become the living sacrifices the Apostle Paul commands us to be.

There are many sacrifices in the Old Testament and lots & lots of details,

But as you will see in reviewing the Covenantal material I included today:

- **There are three major sacrifices that establish the pattern we see in our Covenant Renewal Worship...**

The writer of the Hebrews goes to GREAT length to explain how all of this relates to the work of Jesus and how we CANNOT go back to the animal sacrifices now that Jesus has fulfilled them all...

- **But they do inform us about the work of Jesus!**

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 translated and called the Ascension Offering.**
- **The focus here is 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 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:

- **We will focus on this next week with 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.

- **However the forgiveness of our sins is not the end of the matter when God moves to renew covenant with us as His people.**
- **The writer of Hebrews goes to great length to explain from chapters 4 to 10 how the tabernacle and temple were patterns of God's throne & how the sacrifices showed the coming work of Jesus! *[great homework]***

In chapter four the writer presents the Word of God as a sharp doubled edged sword that could divide between the bone and the marrow. The image of the Priest's knife that was used to prepare those animals for the ascension offerings would certainly have come to minds of these Jewish listeners.

- **Keep in mind what changes those animals in the Old Testament: the knife & the fire...**
- **We are changed here today by the Word & the Spirit!**

Finally, in chapter ten we are warned to NOT to forsake the assembling of ourselves together because we are to be those living sacrifices, as the Apostle Paul calls us, that the Great High Priest Jesus will now consecrate and prepare for service.

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

After our time of confession and absolution [*kids, remember that word?*] we sing a song of thanks!

The Saints in Revelation 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."

- Thus we should sing out a hearty song of thanks!

Next we read a portion of Scripture in unison or responsively as we begin the process of being instructed or changed 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.

- Here again, we must 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!

These readings 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 and the account of Creation on a regular basis here at Church of the King.

- We sing a song of response...
- And then the morning text is read & the sermon is preached.

This is perhaps the easiest place for some to slip into thinking they are just spectators during worship...

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!

- This is the practical portion of the service not because I include the appropriate applications in my sermon but because we believe that the Spirit uses all of the message 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.

- It is also why the Word of God IS central:

Not because everything points to the sermon, not because I got my three points right, 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 & recall!
[notice their comments later in the week...]**

We also try to keep them engaged with illustrations and/or questions they can understand...

- **This is important because it often teaches the adults some of those critical lessons at the same time!**

Obviously, many in our modern age are shocked to see our children present in the worship service... Especially a service that includes a thirty to forty minute sermon! We do so because we really DO believe they are in covenant with God & members of the Body of Christ, [like little Liam who received his new name this morning!] Their obedience here reflects proper training from their parents...

- **And the rest of us learn lessons about patience, as parents deal with the times of testing that always come!**

After the sermon we continue our worship with a song of response and then read a passage of Scripture together focused on the importance of our tithes and offerings.

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

Many churches downplay the offering not wanting to appear too materialistic, but 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.**

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 knowing the prayers of the Saints are a delight to God!**

They are sweet-smelling savors that go up before God like the smoke from those ascension offerings...

- **We see both our gifts & prayers pictured this way in the New Testament**

Phillipians 4:16 "For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. 18 Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God."

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, and 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 gives us the right focus for all of life: “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...

- We 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 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 all that we have in this world is a gift from God
- In prayer we see that true power in our lives comes only from the very throne of God...

Thus we should understand more fully the importance of the conclusion that the writer of Hebrews rightly states after his long treatise on worship: “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:

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. 3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. 4 For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.