

Our Highest Privilege, Duty, and Joy – *Hebrews 12:18-29*

Introduction – Like hurrying into your bedroom looking for something but forgetting what it was you were looking for, do you ever have the experience of rushing into this service of worship forgetting why you came here? In addition, if we do come with certain expectations, noble and good as they might be, are they biblical? Does God have a particular purpose in drawing us together on the Lord's Day?

The new CREC Memorial on Worship begins, “*We believe that Lord's Day worship is our highest privilege, our greatest duty, and our deepest joy. God has created us for just this purpose: to worship Him, and to be transformed by that worship.*”

Two questions – Do we really believe this? Do we really expect this? On the one hand, I am asking these questions of the sentences above from the Memorial. On the other hand, I am really asking these questions regarding our passage in Hebrews.

The Centrality of The New Temple (Heb 12:18-24) – Writing to Jews at a time when they were scattered all over the Roman empire, this author exhorts them to go to the better, new Jerusalem, home of the new temple and the better sacrifice. What is there in this message for us? We have come to a more glorious, more terrifying, more efficacious event than if we had been at Mt. Sinai with Moses. And this is because, covenantally, we are brought up into the heavens (vv22-24). *Lord's Day worship is our highest privilege.*

The Need to Believe (Heb 11:1ff) – How would we come to believe that we are in the company of angels and before the throne of the Lamb in this service? Hebrews 12 comes on the heels of Hebrews 11 which had already given the answer. People do and believe the strangest things when they have been granted evangelical faith. This is not a faith that comes from within – it is the gift of God (Eph 2:8-9). It is a faith that is stirred up in the proclamation of the Word (Rom 10:17), and faithfulness is stirred up in the midst of this sacred assembly (Heb 10:19-25).

God the Terrible (Heb 12:25-29, Psalm 99:1-3 AV) – “*The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble: he sitteth between the cherubims; let the earth be moved. The LORD is great in Zion; and he is high above all the people. Let them praise thy great and terrible name; for it is holy*”. What are grown men to do when they come to this place, if in fact we have been gathered up into the heaven? We find ourselves in the midst of pure holiness. And this holiness is not saccharine-sweet and smarmy (dim the lights and play soft music). It's not very marketable. The Lord speaks and mountains are leveled (Psalm 46:6-7), and we have been invited up and in to hear His next announcements. Why should we not see these latest hurricanes as truly from the hand and mouth of God (Psalm 99:4-6)? – we are told that these things reveal His holiness, His terrible holiness.

We Reign With Him (Eph 2:4-6) – In our worship, we sit with Christ (or in Christ) at His place of rule over heaven and earth. In some fashion, we participate in the shaking of the earth and the spread of the Light of all ages while in this service of worship. *Lord's Day worship is our greatest duty.*

Our Deepest Joy (Psalm 97:11-12, Psalm 95:1-2) – “*Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling*” (Psalm 2:11). “*The Lord your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing*” (Zeph 3:17). How can this be a place of trembling and rejoicing? Because in the midst of His earth-shattering glory, He is rejoicing over us with (loud) singing. He calls us to Himself. He cleanses us with His forgiveness. He exhorts and fills us with His Word. He feeds us at His table. He sends us with His name and in His power. He really likes you. He really loves you. He really loves to give you His grace, His Spirit, His power, His authority, His beauty, His fullness – and you cannot ever finish receiving it, measuring it, understanding it (Eph 3:14ff). And He tells you about it personally as He tells us about it, the “*whole family in heaven and earth.*” This is the place of rest, of fellowship with God, man, and even self. This is the only place on earth where everything else makes sense. And so *Lord's Day worship is our deepest joy.*

Transformed by that Worship (Rom 12:1-2) – This command is given to Christians and is therefore not a once-for-all-time commitment, but rather a regular, ongoing event in one's life. Punctuated by weekly Lord's Day worship, we come out not just instructed but, by faith, transformed, to live out what God is working in. And throughout that week, we live, we worship, we sacrifice, and we prepare to present again to God all that we have done on the next Lord's Day, coming like hungry sheep to be led again as a flock to greener pastures.

Nowhere Else to Go – If it was true for the Jew, who had explicit verses he could turn to for his defense that he should go to the earthly Jerusalem, that there was no better place for him on earth to be on the Lord's Day than in the heavenly Jerusalem service, how much more for us? There are all kinds of times for personal, private devotions, and for wonderful gatherings of saints and sinners around a good Bible study or fellowship or service – and these are critical to the life of the church (i.e. James 1:27). There is also a time to play and a time to work, a time to worship God and a time to mow the lawn. But in order for everything else to make sense and to be done to the glory of God - *We believe that Lord's Day worship is our highest privilege, our greatest duty, and our deepest joy. God has created us for just this purpose: to worship Him, and to be transformed by that worship.*

Notes for Little Saints

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Which do you think would be more frightful –

To be at the mountain when Moses received the 10 Commandments?

Or to be at church right now?

Hebrews 12 is written to believers who are gathered at church – and they are being told that it is more real to be in this assembly than to go to Jerusalem and the Temple – or even to have been at Mt. Sinai where God came in fire and smoke and earthquakes.

Read Hebrews 12:18-21.

Now read vv 22-24 – and list the 10 things that we have come to when we have come to church.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)
- 7)
- 8)
- 9)
- 10)

When we come to church, then, where should we by faith understand that we are going?

And if I cannot see that – I can remember Hebrews 11:1 – Write out that verse