

Heb. 12:18-24; Ex. 19:12-25; The New Covenant Worship I. The OT Service II. The NT Service

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, are you better off living today than the saints who lived during the Minor Prophets? If so, how are you better off? In what ways do we benefit being a member of the NT church- as part of the New Covenant? Today we consider how Jesus Christ provides access to a better worship service- since we are embraced in a new covenant by His blood. Last week as we finished our series on the Minor Prophets, we touched on many different topics with quick and passing application. For example, Malachi spoke about right worship, family and marriage issues- even money and possessions. Over the next few weeks, we are going to go back and pick up a few of these issues as we consider the end of Heb. 12 and 13. This week, we start with worship. The Minor Prophets had a lot to say about true worship- how it was a heart issue. As we look at Heb. 12, we find that God is still concerned with how we worship. This week we look at the benefits of living in the New Covenant- how it better than the old when it comes to worship. Now Hebrews was written to the early church in a time of great persecution. It was tempting for these Jews who long for the old ways- and even some did indeed go back to the Old services at the temple and their sacrifices. But the writer of Hebrews goes to great lengths to prove the superiority of Jesus as the perfect prophet and priest- how we in the New Covenant have it so much better than they did in the old. Why would you go back to the shadow when the reality had arrived? With its many allusions to the OT- Hebrew 12 is going to compare and contrast the old and the new worship service. So today we consider how Jesus Christ provides access to a better worship service.

I. The OT Service

In the Old Testament, where did the people have to go to worship God? Well, the male leaders of the house were supposed to go to the temple in Jerusalem 3 times a year for their regular feasts, sacrifices and ceremonies. They did not have the freedom to build a temple and altar in their back yard- that was forbidden! They could not hire their own priest- that would be idolatry! There was one location- one sanctioned place where sacrifices could be offered. In order to set the stage for the OT service- to illustrate what it was like- the writer of Hebrews starts in 12:18 by bringing us back to the institution of the Mosaic Law- when Israel was

gathered around Mt. Sinai as we read in Ex. 19. Now what was it like- when the Israelites first met their God and heard His word while they were camped around the mountain. When the foot of God rested upon the mountain in Ex. 19:16 says- on the day when Israel came to meet God, the Mountain was wrapped in smoke, lighting and thunder flashed and shook the mountain- a piercing trumpet blast, thick fire and smoke. And there was a strict command given- even repeated. Do not touch this mountain- warn the people- set up a barrier so that the people do not push through. If they touch this mountain, they must be stoned or shot with arrows. As we read in Heb. 12:20- they were commanded not to touch this mountain- because it was a mountain that could be touched. Death was the warning! Mt. Sinai was a physical mountain located in a specific place- seen with a physical eye- made out of dirt and rock. And the sight of it produced great fear- 12:21- even Moses trembled with fear. It was an awe-inspiring- even awful and terrifying sight! And the sound- strong words of warning and piercing in their exposing of sin. God spoke and answered in the thunder- and the people were terrified- asking Moses to take their place to speak to God for them- and listen to God on their behalf- as 12:20 goes on to say- they could not bear nor endure the words that they heard and the orders given. The Law was for them a great weight and burden- a heavy yoke they could not carry- it overwhelmed them. Filling all people- include Moses the man of God- with great fear- so that they were afraid and filled with dread! They could see that God was a consuming fire as 12:29 says- it was a real threat as they saw the fire and smoke! So the first time that the entire OT congregation- the whole of the 12 tribes gets to meet and listen to God- they are overcome with the justice and holiness of God! The Law by itself is a heavy thing- it condemns- and the people are told- stand back! If you attempt to push your way to God- if you try on your own strength to work your way into His presence- if you think that you can keep the Law all by yourself- you will merit only wrath and death! You can only worship at a distance- stand back- because you cannot endure my presence! Stand in awe of your God! The Law remained written on tablets of stone- the blood of bulls and goats would run continuously and without end- and yet no lasting forgiveness could be attained! That is what the OT worship service was like- but that is not how

we worship today! In the OT ceremonies- only the HP could enter the Most Holy Place- and that only once a year! How about today- who can enter the Most Holy Place of God's dwelling?

II. The NT Service

Children, where do we go when we go to worship God? Where do we go when we go to church? Well, the answer may not be as simple as you think! When we gather together for worship- although we may remain physically in this location here in Lynwood- by the Spirit we are actually transferred to a new location! Praise God- a new and living way into God's presence has been opened! A new kind of service has begun- the NT worship has been inaugurated! And although we cannot see the Mountain upon which we worship- that does not make our worship any less real! Instead of earthly priest, we have a heavenly priest who lives to intercede for us. Instead of having the Law written on tablets of stone, we by the Holy Spirit have the Law written on our hearts! Indeed- by the Spirit we are not only indwelt by God- we are in fact dwelling with God in heaven! As v. 22 begins, you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God- the heavenly Jerusalem. Note that it says- you have come- you all are now- this is a reality that is presently taking place. Hebrews does not say- you will one day come- the writer of this book says you already now are- you have come and you do draw near. What happens when we worship our God in Spirit and in Truth- is that we are ushered into the heavenly realms in which God dwells. The fact is- today- we are by the Spirit standing in God's presence- up above- in glory! And we can see this heavenly city when we look with the eyes of faith! Because of Jesus Christ who has opened this new and living way- we are right now welcomed- ushered into the inner sanctuary. We have immediate acceptance and direct access to the Holy God! We need not wait until the new Jerusalem comes down- we are already citizens and in many ways present in this city now- already! As Phil. 3 says- our citizenship is in heaven. Not only are we made into temples of God on earth- we are brought into the true temple of God above! As such, we find that our numbers grow exponentially! As v. 22 ends, we are brought into the presence of innumerable angels in festal gathering. We are worshipping with- and in the presence of innumerable angels. A host- or a myriad of angelic beings stand around us here below- and in our midst up above! It does not matter

the size of our congregation here below- and if that size gets bigger or smaller- that size does not diminish the fact that we are a part of something- participating with a number of angels that cannot be counted! And those angels are dressed for a feast- it is a festal gathering. They are ready for the wedding supper of the lamb! To them- worship is not a solemn, sad event! It is a feast of joy- of gladness and praise! It is with good reason that our HC LD says that the Lord's Day is a festive day of praise! Not afraid to worship and kept at a distance- but close to our God- coming near with joy and gladness in our hearts! Added to this assembly of the saint- we are joined in number by the great cloud of witnesses- the assembly of the firstborn as v. 23 continues. As we worship our God together here below- we are joined by the saints up above- those who have gone before- some of whom are listed by name in Heb. 11. These who have their name written in the book of Life- part of God's family- these are called the assembly of the Firstborn. The church is made up of joint heirs; or as Rom. 8 puts it- we are fellow heirs with Christ. Jesus Christ as the firstborn son- and we as the children adopted by grace- are brought together. Where we have the rights and privileges of the firstborn son- richly blessed beyond comparison! We are already part of this group- a member of the church universal- part of the bride of Christ. We have- as v. 23 continues- come to God. We are brought to God our Father- the judge over all- the creator of heaven and earth! We are welcomed into the Most Holy Place- to stand in His presence! Brought to the God of election- who chose us before the foundation of the world- who calls us His people- and He Himself our God- who makes us saints- who declares us righteous- justified- and one day perfect and glorified! And finally- when we worship we come to Jesus- we see our Savior and Lord- the mediator of this new covenant as v. 24 concludes. We are brought before the one who has died for us- whose one sacrifice has purchased us and ransomed up- the one who brings peace between God and man- the one who came down to become man- our Immanuel- we now by the Spirit are brought back up to Him where we worship! His blood that was shed once for all has changed how we worship- giving us the right of access and fulfilling the types and OT ceremonies. His blood is perfect and sufficient- His blood ushering in a new covenant that speaks of peace and forgiveness that last forever! Now although we do not always think about it this way- Heb. 12 reveals just what exactly is

taking place when we gather together for worship. When two or three are gathered in His name- Christ is there with them. But His body- we His members must also be where He is! If the vine is in heaven- His branches must be as well! And when the Church gathers together for worship in Spirit and in Truth- those worshippers are ushered into the heavenly realms- into the presence of the saints and angels above- placed in the very presence of God the Father and the Son. When asked- where did you go today? Most Christians would say that they went to church- but you could also say- I went to heaven today! That's what Heb. 12 says- we have come to the heavenly Jerusalem- to Mt. Zion- we have come to our God! We stand in His presence! We need not travel on some pilgrimage to go to a holy site- to visit a holy city here below- there are no holy places now on earth- but we do get to travel to a holy place every week! We get to go to the Mt. Zion- to the heavenly Jerusalem- as we worship our God together! With that in mind- listen to Heb. 10:25- do not forsake- do not neglect to meet together as some do- but rather come together to encourage one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. Why would we want to forsake the church here below- why would we give up the opportunity to be brought into heaven- to have a foretaste of the glories to come? Who would willingly neglect or forsake such a gift as this?! Instead of death- we have life and fellowship promised and already enjoyed!

To conclude, this week we have caught a glimpse- a little vision of what is taking place and what will one day be fully enjoyed. One of the chief benefits we have of being in the New Covenant- being a part of the New Testament people- is that we have greater access and clarity when it comes to worshipping our God! The Mediator of the Covenant has given us these gifts! Jesus Christ provides access to a better worship service. Next week we are going to build on this point by considering how this access to our God changes how we listen to His Word. The Mediator of the Covenant is also the Messenger of the Covenant as we will see next time. But for today, let us all rejoice- reflecting on the fact that Jesus Christ has opened the way for us to partake of this festal praise of our God today! You have come to the New Jerusalem- you now stand on Mt. Zion- so rejoice in this privileged access that Jesus has secured!