

Imagine the glory of that day!

Just think.

The Israelites, assembled in Jerusalem with Solomon,
saw the glory of God descend upon the temple.

God himself came to the children of Israel in the cloud,
as if to say, "YES, I will dwell in your midst!"

I will be with you.

And yet, Paul tells us that the glory of old covenant worship
pales in comparison to the glory of our worship today.

What is the relationship between Solomon's worship and ours?

What does this text teach us about OUR worship?

I would suggest that our worship ought to look exactly like Solomon's!

That may sound strange, but let me explain.

Worship throughout the history of redemption has changed a great deal,
but it looks remarkably similar from the creation to the new creation.

In other words, there is both continuity and discontinuity.

Go back to the garden.

What did worship consist of in Eden?

God spoke to Adam and Eve,
and they responded with obedience,
and ate of the covenant meal--the Tree of Life.

But unfortunately, Adam and Eve turned to idolatry--to false worship.

They did not listen to the Word of God,
they listened to the word of the serpent,
and responded by obeying HIS voice,
and partaking of a different covenant meal
--the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

And if you look at worship throughout the OT,
you will a similar pattern.

The worship of God throughout Scripture consists of hearing God's voice,
responding in faith and obedience, and partaking of the covenant meal.

That's the basic pattern;

but throughout the history of redemption God has given us more detail.

There are only a few worship services described in detail in Scripture,

but they all follow a remarkably similar pattern--

Exodus 19-24; I Chron 15-16; 28-29; 2 Chron 5-7; 29 (Hezekiah); 35 (Josiah); Neh 8-10.

What is that pattern?

Look at our text:

1--Solomon assembles the people in Zion (5:2-5)

2--sacrifices the sheep and oxen (5:6)

3--the ark is placed in the Most Holy Place (5:7-10)

4--they sing the praise of God (5:11-14)

5--they hear the Word of God, read and preached (6:1-11)

- 6–Solomon prays for the covenant community (6:12-42)
- 7–fire comes down from heaven
- 8–they respond by singing the praises of God (7:1-3)
- 9–they conclude by partaking of the peace offerings/covenant meal (7:4-7)

Does that look familiar?

This is essentially the order of worship that the church has used throughout her history.

Justin Martyr describes a similar order in the second century.

The Reformers follow the basic pattern in the 16th c.

And most Reformed churches today still use it--as do most Xn churches in general.

1. Entering Worship on the Basis of the Sacrifice (5:2-14)

Some of you may be puzzled.

"wait a minute--we don't offer sacrifices at the beginning and end of worship!"

True enough, but we do the same thing.

After all, how do you enter the Most Holy Place?

When we gather together for worship,

do we just come waltzing in to the throne room of God

and say, "Howdy Big Guy!"

No! God forbid!

You see,

when the Israelites came to the temple on earth,

(which was, after all, a picture of the heavenly temple)

they had to come with a sacrifice.

they had to come with the blood of a lamb,

and they could only enter vicariously--through the High Priest,

and that only once a year.

But now, look at Heb 9.

Heb 7-10 is a glorious commentary on the worship of the old covenant,

and how it relates to the worship of the new covenant.

Heb 9:6-14

When YOU come to the heavenly temple;

when YOU come to enter the heavenly Most Holy Place;

you DARE NOT COME without a sacrifice.

you dare not come without the blood of the lamb.

If you try to enter the Holy of Holies without the blood of the sacrifice,

then God will destroy you.

This is why our prayer of confession reminds God of the blood of the lamb.

This is why the reformers

all insisted that a prayer of confession belongs at the beginning of worship.

God has not prescribed a set form of words,

but he warned us not to enter his presence without a sacrifice (Heb 9:22).

But now when we gather at the temple

(and remember that Christ IS the temple--we are gathering IN CHRIST)

(Jesus says in John 4 that we don't have to worship in Jerusalem anymore,

but where we worship is still important

--we must worship in the Spirit and in truth!)
But now--and this is the glorious part!--We all may go in to the holy of holies!
Look at Heb 10:19-22

Hebrews is using a whole lot of OT imagery here.
Before a priest could enter the holy place,
 he had to wash his body with water.
Before the high priest could enter the holiest place,
 he had to be sprinkled with the blood of the lamb.
Hebrews is telling us that we all can now enter the Most Holy Place,
because our bodies have been washed with pure water--in our baptism,
and our hearts have sprinkled with the blood of Christ!
So now, every Sunday, as we assemble together
--at God's call and at his command--
we now enter the Holy of Holies (not the earthly copy that Solomon built,
 but the heavenly reality that JESUS has built)
the temple made without hands;
 and we now worship him in the Spirit, and in truth.

In 2 Chronicles 5:7-10 we hear how the priests brought the ark of the covenant
into the Most Holy Place.

In Exodus the ark had been placed in the tabernacle –
a tent that moved around with the people of God.

The point of the tabernacle – and now of the temple –
was to have a place where God would dwell in the midst of his people.

Having brought the ark into the Holy of Holies,
the Levites burst forth into song--praising God for his mercy and goodness.

Music and song only entered the regular worship of Israel in the time of David.

It is quite likely that they sang Psalm 106 or 136 on this occasion.

5:13 only reports the opening line of the Psalm,
 but both of those Psalms start with this line,
 and would be quite fitting;

 for both tell of God's work of redeeming his people from Egypt.

Even so, we too should sing of God's work in redemptive history.

It is unfortunately one thing that is lacking in our hymnody.

There are some wonderful hymns that speak of Christ and his work,
 but too few make the connection to how this fulfills the whole history of redemption.

But that's why it is still important to sing Psalms in worship –
 because the Psalms remind us of how all of OT history is still our story.

And so when the ark is brought into the Most Holy Place,
"the house of the LORD was filled with a cloud,
 so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud,
 for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God." (6:13-14)

This is the same glory that appeared at Sinai –

the glory that Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 3 is a fading glory.
Paul tells us that the ministry of the Spirit has "even more glory."
"We all, with unveiled face, behold the glory of the Lord." (2 Cor 3:18).

How do we behold the glory of the Lord?

We behold the glory of the Lord in the preaching of the gospel.

That's what Paul says in 2 Cor 4:3-6

"And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing.
In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers,
to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ,
who is the image of God.

For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord,
with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts
to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God
in the face of Jesus Christ."

This is why preaching must always be Christ-centered!

The preaching of the gospel must always show you Jesus.

As you look for a pastor, find a man who will show you the glory of the Christ!

2. Hearing the Word of God (6:1-11)

That is certainly what Solomon does!

His text is found in v5-6

It is quite likely that Solomon's speech was considerably longer than this summary,
but it is clear that the sermon focuses upon what God has said
and what He has done in redeeming his people.

Notice that it focuses upon what God has done in history.

God has been faithful to his promises, and has accomplished all that he had said.

He has given his people a place where they may worship him;
and he has given them a king who will lead them in his ways.

This the language of Land and Seed.

God had promised Abraham that he would give him children who would inherit the land.

And through his covenant with Israel God gave them the land.

The books of Judges and of Samuel tell us of how Israel failed.

And so God chose one man to represent Israel – the son of David.

And he chose one place to dwell – the temple in Jerusalem.

So Solomon's sermon is a Christ-centered sermon!

Christ, after all, is simply the Greek word for "anointed one" – or Meshiach in Hebrew.

Solomon's sermon is all about how David's anointed son
would build a house for God's name.

In one sense, Solomon was the "Messiah" – but of course,
Solomon fell short too.

And now Jesus Christ has fulfilled both the promise of the Seed
(he is the Anointed Son of David)
and the promise of the Land (he is the holy temple).

And in Christ,
God has given YOU the heavenly Jerusalem as your home,
a city that shall not be moved.
And David's glorious son--Jesus Christ--is the great king
who will go before you to destroy your enemies and lead you home.

3. The Response of the People of God (6:12-42)

This then is the theme of the prayer of the covenant community:
asking God to continue to be faithful to his Word.

Why does the prayer follow the sermon?

Because the prayer of the covenant community
is the response of God's people to His Word.
The Word of God declares his wonderful work of redemption;
the prayer of the covenant community asks him
to continue to do that work in our midst
I would love to expound this prayer in full,
but let me simply note this:
Just like everything else in this passage,
read this prayer in the light of Christ.
I have heard some people use this prayer to say that if America will repent,
then God will heal this land and make it great.

God has made no such promise.
Look at the way that the term "land" is used.
v24-25--the land which you gave to them and their fathers
vv26-27--your land which you have given to your people as an inheritance.
The Land refers to the Promised Land.
And Paul shows us in Rom 4:11 that the promise of the Land
has been extended to the whole earth
The New Creation is our inheritance.
When Solomon speaks of Israel,
we need to think of the Church.
And when Solomon speaks of the land,
we need to think of the New Heavens and the New Earth.
After all,
our citizenship is not of this world, but is of the age to come.
our hope is not that America would become great,
our hope is that God will bring all godless nations to ruin,
and establish the kingdom of His Son.

But notice that the prayer again focuses on redemption.
Yes, all the details of life are included,
but Solomon seeks to understand all the details of life

within God's purposes of redemptive history.
Our worship ought to cause us to see that our everyday affairs fit into a larger pattern.
Brothers and sisters,
there has been a slow, subtle shift in the way the church thinks.
Three hundred years ago it was common to find ordinary Christians
who thought about life in redemptive historical terms.
In other words,
people who looked at their lives as bound up in the history of redemption.
I think of Mary Rowlandson.
She was the wife of a Puritan pastor in New England.
In 1676 she was captured by Narragansett Indians and held for several months.
After she was ransomed she wrote a narrative of her experience called:
The Sovereignty and Goodness of God.
The way she talks about her time with the Indians is interesting.
Passages of Scripture flow from her pen
But she doesn't just quote Scripture--she lives it.
She saw herself as though she was living through the Exile.
When she weeps at her affliction, she quotes Psalm 137:1--
"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept:
yea, we wept when we remembered Zion"
Like the exiles from Israel and Judah,
she sees herself as being chastened by God for her sins.
Yet still she finds her hope in her Redeemer.

Do you see your life as reflecting biblical history?

When you suffer, do you think of yourself as sharing in the sufferings of Christ
who was exiled for us?

When you are honored, do you think of yourself as sharing in his exaltation?

I suppose what I'm doing is asking you to think in a different way.

Too often we ask, "how does this text apply to me?"

We ought to be asking, "how does my life fit in to the text?"

The Word of God is what is true.

The Word of God is what is solid.

Man's life is but a vapor--and like the grass it is soon withered.

For the flower fades, the grass withers, but the Word of the Lord endures forever.

Look again at Solomon's prayer.

Notice what he does: he starts with a situation--"if anyone sins",
"if your people are defeated"; "when there is no rain"; and so on--
and sees these things in the light of heaven.

He takes everyday situations and applies them to the Word of God.

He's not interpreting the promises of God and applying them to everyday life.

Rather, he's taking everyday life, and interpreting them by the promises of God!

Is that clear?

Your life is not the center of the universe.

Modernism says that man is at the center,

and all things need to be applied to him.
The Word of God says that Christ is at the center,
and all things need to be applied to him.
Do you understand what that does?
When you are struggling with something in life,
don't ask, "how does Scripture apply to my situation?"
That's the wrong question--that suggests that you are at the center.
Rather, ask this:
"how does my situation fit into Scripture?"
"how does what I face relate to what God has said and he has done?"
Your life needs to be reinterpreted in the light of Christ.
Your life only makes sense, if it is seen within the context of heaven.
So Solomon makes heaven the center of his prayer.

Solomon closes his prayer asking God to arise and enter his resting place,
"You and the ark of your might.
Let your priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation,
and let your saints rejoice in your goodness.
O LORD God, do not turn away the face of your anointed one! (Your Messiah)
Remember your steadfast love for David your servant." (6:41-42)

This is either a quotation from Psalm 132,
or else the author of Psalm 132 used Solomon's prayer as the foundation for his song!

And when Solomon finishes this prayer,
God answers.
Fire comes down from heaven and consumes the burnt offering and the sacrifices,
and the glory of the Lord fills the temple.
This happens every Sunday!
Pretty cool, eh?
I bet you never thought of it that way before!
But when you offer up your prayers before the throne of God,
God hears them, and answers them by his Holy Spirit. (Rev. 8:5)
After all,
this glory cloud that fills the temple, and this fire that burns up the offerings,
is nothing other than the coming of the Holy Spirit.
The Holy Spirit, after all, is the member of the Holy Trinity
who applies the work of redemption to his people.
He is the one who comes and dwells in the temple.
He cannot yet be poured out upon the people,
because Christ has not yet come.
But on the Day of Pentecost,
fire was poured out upon the Church.
On the Day of Pentecost,
the Church was baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire.
And every Lord's Day, as you gather together,
and as your prayers ascend to heaven,

as sweet incense comes before the throne;
God hears them and answers by his Holy Spirit.
After all, the Spirit dwells with glory in the temple,
and YOU ARE the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The people then respond with joy by singing of God's goodness and mercy.
It is not enough to have heard the word of God.
We must respond--and our voices must be united
in proclaiming our praise for this wonderful redemption.

4. Partaking of the Covenant meal (7:4-7)

And finally,
the king and his people offer sacrifices--burnt offerings and peace offerings.
The peace offering, if you look back to Leviticus where it was instituted,
was to be eaten by all those who offered it.
Here, the whole assembly would gather together to share the peace offering
(I think 22,000 bulls and 120,000 sheep would probably be enough!)

Worship concludes with the covenant meal.
Here the worshipers partake of the sacrifice.
The principle is simple: if the sacrifice is to be valid for you,
then you must partake of the sacrifice.
We do not offer any new sacrifices,
after all, our sacrifice was made on the cross two thousand years ago.
But we partake of that sacrifice every Sunday.
After all, if you want peace with God,
then you must partake of Christ.
The peace offering was offered at the end of worship to symbolize
the peace that had come through the shedding of blood.
This is what Paul says in I Cor 10:16-18.
Those who eat of the sacrifice, partake in that sacrifice.
The bread that we break and the cup that we bless
are a participation in the body and blood of Christ.
We now have peace with God through the death and resurrection of Christ.

Conclusion

We have seen how this order of worship points us to Christ.
But is it really necessary?
Isn't this just temple worship?

In the last couple hundred years it has become quite popular in some circles
to say that Christian worship is based on the synagogue
-NOT on the temple.
But if you look through the NT,
you will find that the apostles do not think about worship
in terms of the synagogue.
The reason is because no Jew ever called a synagogue meeting "worship"
until after the destruction of the temple in AD 70.

The synagogue was a place for studying scripture and prayer,
but it was not a place of worship.

Does that sound odd to you?

Perhaps the reason is because we are used to worship
that consists simply of prayer, singing, and preaching.

But the apostles were not.

Every worship service mentioned in Scripture includes a covenant meal.

In other words, every time Scripture talks about the people of God
corporately meeting with their God,
it includes participation in the sacrifice
through partaking of the covenant meal.

In Acts 2:42 we hear that the church in Jerusalem

"continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship,
in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."

Four verses later it says that they met "daily with one accord in the temple,
and breaking bread from house to house"

It appears that the Jerusalem church had daily communion;

but while daily communion is appropriate
(and it was practiced in many places in the early church),
obviously it was not always possible for the church to gather daily.

In Acts 20:7, we hear of the church of Troas:

"Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread,
Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them..."

Notice how this is put.

The meeting of the church is called "coming together to break bread."

How many of us would describe our worship in these terms?

The sermon is important—but the meeting itself is described in terms of breaking bread.

The third description of NT worship is found in 1 Corinthians 11:17-22

Once again, worship is described in terms of the covenant meal.

WHY do the apostles think of worship in terms of the breaking of bread?

If the apostles were modeling their worship on the synagogue,
then they would never have called the public assembly of the people of God
"Coming together to break bread."

But the apostles do not model their worship on the synagogue,
because the synagogue was not worship.

The synagogue has no sacrifice!

The synagogue has no way to deal with sin!

And most importantly, the synagogue has no priest!

When the church comes together to meet with her God,

she has a sacrifice—the sacrifice of Jesus Christ!

And because we come together in his name,

we have the assurance of the forgiveness of sins.

The synagogue was a Sabbath school.
It was the best the average Israelite could do.
They couldn't enter the Holy of Holies,
so they had to gather at a distance and pray.

Is that all that we are doing?
Are we barred from entering the Holy of Holies?
Are we simply gathering at a distance from Heaven,
praying toward the temple,
relying upon some distant priesthood?

NO!!!

That's why we read Hebrews 10!
YOU may have confidence to ENTER the heavenly Holy of Holies,
because YOU have been washed with pure water;
YOU have been sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ,
And therefore YOU (plural) may come into the very presence of God.

Christian worship is even greater and MORE glorious than temple worship,
Because our worship is not merely an earthly picture of the heavenly worship;
our worship is a participation in the heavenly worship (next week-Rev).

Our worship is to remind us of who we really are.

This is why

- 1) we come into worship on the basis of the sacrifice.
We are to remember that we are here because of what Jesus Christ has done!
- 2) we then hear the Word of God remind us of what God has accomplished in Christ;
We too easily forget who Christ is, what he has done,
who we are in Christ, and what that means for our lives
-and we need to be called back week after week; day after day.
- 3) we then respond to the Word with our prayers and praises,
rejoicing in what he has done, and asking him to reorient us to our true identity.
- 4) we conclude with the covenant meal.
It is not enough merely to believe in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
We must partake of him who is our life.

We're not talking about some abstract idea here.

This is not something intellectual.

This is a historical reality that is every bit as real as what happened in Solomon's day.

The means of grace-the Word, prayer, and the Sacraments-are designed by God
to provide YOU with the strength that you need to walk before him day by day.

Our worship here, each Sunday, is to remind you of who you really are.

We come together into the heavenly Holy of Holies each Sunday,
to remind one another that this is our true home.

Remember that and live this week as those who have beheld with unveiled faces
the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.