

Joining the Heavenly Worship through Christ, Part 2

2 Corinthians 5:1–11, Revelation 4

This morning we considered the significance of the text in Hebrews 12: “[We] have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. . . . But [we] have come to Mount Zion . . . the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant.”

We noted the verb: “*have* come,” not “*will* come.” This wonderful text describes a present reality, not a future state. When the church worships, even now, in Christ we indeed come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem. We worship with the great company of the saints who have gone before us, who were faithful unto death. We worship with a great company of angels that we cannot see, holy angels that are “ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation” (Heb. 1:14 ESV). All we see are the pastor, elders and people around us, but by faith we know that we are surrounded by the great cloud of faithful men and women who went before us, testifying to the truth of God and the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, as well as the holy angels who unceasingly give glory to the God of heaven.

This is the church triumphant which stands, even now, in the presence of the risen Lamb, having rested from their labors. We have never seen this holy company, but someday the whole number of the elect of every age will gather in the personal presence of the Lamb; the church militant will become the church triumphant; the church invisible will become the church visible before the eyes of him whose eyes are like a flame of fire; faith will become sight; and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him. Then, and only then, will we be enabled to see that which was known to God at the beginning. The saints and faithful brethren from all the ages will gather as a visible body.

But in the meantime, know that what is now invisible to our natural sight is a true, spiritual reality. Indeed, our worship has greater significance than we can imagine.

I have three points this afternoon: (1) Christ has come down and has ascended again; (2) True worship occurs where Christ is: in the heavenly sanctuary; and (3) You are not a spectator watching a performance, but an active participant. First, **1. Christ has come down and has ascended again.**

Again, as this morning, I want to share some insights expressed by OPC minister Camden Bucey in a recent article.

Christ has come down from heaven. He became a man, was incarnate, took upon him human flesh, assumed our nature, became in all points like as we are, yet without sin, lived a perfect life in obedience to the law of God, and went to the cross to die for our sins. His body was laid in a tomb under constant guard of a Roman squadron.

He arose from the dead by his own power, he was risen for our justification, he seen by witnesses who stuck by their testimony and did not recant, even if it meant going to their death. He ascended into heaven. Consequently, we at present are joining the perfect worship that Christ himself, our Great High Priest, is already offering to the Father. Our imperfect prayers are gathered up into his perfect intercession. Our faltering praise is joined to his perfect declaration of the Father's worth. Our weak faith is upheld by his perfect faithfulness.

As Bucey helpfully points out, this profoundly affects how we approach worship. We come not primarily to express ourselves to God, but to join what Jesus is already doing in heaven. We come not to achieve a certain emotional state, but to participate by faith in heavenly realities. We come not to create an experience, but to enter by faith into the experience of perfect communion that Christ has opened to us.

Does this make our physical gathering less important? Not at all. God has ordained that we experience heavenly worship through ordinary earthly means—through water, bread, and wine, through human voices raised in song, through the spoken word of Scripture and preaching. These physical elements are not obstacles to true worship; they are the means God uses to join us to heaven's worship.

Think of the ladder that Jacob saw in a dream, with angels ascending and descending. Our worship creates a similar connection between heaven and earth—not through our efforts to climb up, but through Christ who has come down and ascended again, bringing us with him into God's presence. This is the nature of heavenly worship. We worship now by faith, but we do so in the confidence that one day faith will give way to sight, and we will join fully and finally in the worship we now taste by faith.

We read in Genesis 28 that “Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: “I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants.”

This account is cited in John chapter 1, where Jesus says to Nathanael, “‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.’ Nathanael

answered and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Because I said to you, “I saw you under the fig tree,” do you believe? You will see greater things than these.’ And He said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.’”

Make no mistake: *Jesus is the fulfillment of Jacob’s vision of the ladder*. The angels ascended and descended, but it was possible because the Lord Jesus, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, came to earth to save us.

There is no other way of salvation. As I said yesterday at the wedding, the founders of all the world’s religions lived and died. Of all the world’s religious teachers, only Christ is alive. He rose from the dead. That is his authority. A wise person will listen to Christ. Only Christ can save you from your sins. That is the Gospel.

Christ has come down and has ascended again. Second,

2. True worship occurs where Christ is: in the heavenly sanctuary.

What does it mean to worship in heaven while still living on earth? Consider Paul’s metaphor of our earthly bodies as tents in 2 Corinthians 5. Like ancient Israel’s tabernacle, these temporary dwellings serve their purpose, but they are not our final home. We groan in these tents, Paul says, not because we wish to be unclothed—that is, to exist as disembodied spirits—but because we long to be “further clothed” (v. 5) with our heavenly dwelling. This teaches us something vital about worship: Our present experience, though real, points toward something even greater.

This is why our worship must be in Spirit and in truth. Jesus emphasized this to the Samaritan woman, shifting her focus from the question of physical location—whether to worship on Mount Gerizim or in Jerusalem—to the reality of spiritual communion with God. True worship transcends geography because it occurs where Christ is, in the heavenly sanctuary (John 4:1–26).

Through the Spirit, we commune with God in the true Holy Place not made with hands. Yet this spiritual nature of our worship does not make it less real—if anything, it makes it *more* real. When we gather, we join what is already happening in heaven. Think about what that means: Our congregation’s worship on Sunday morning is not a separate event from heaven’s worship—it is a *participation* in it. The angels who cry, “Holy, Holy, Holy,” the elders who cast their crowns before the throne, the martyrs who cry, “How long, O Lord?”—we join their ongoing worship through our union with Christ.

We read Revelation 4, “After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, ‘Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after

this.’ Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.”

True worship occurs where Christ is: in the heavenly sanctuary. If Christ were not raised, then the church would merely come together to keep alive an old tradition. We would remember how things used to be. But that’s not Christian worship. Rather, when we worship, by faith we are raised up with Christ into the heavenly sanctuary. By faith we hear from Christ. We hear of his great love. We hear his word of pardon. We hear his word of promise. Like the Shulamite of Song of Solomon we hear the word of our Beloved, and the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God: “I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine” (Song 6:3).

This explains why our worship follows patterns revealed in Scripture. The heavenly throne-room scenes in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4–5 show us the reality our worship enters. But here is the wonder of it: *We do not have to generate this worship ourselves*. That is a problem with much of the church’s worship today. It is about setting the right mood or creating an emotional environment. We are not ultimately setting the tone. God calls us to worship, joining something that has already begun.

As we worship, we are joining the perfect worship that Christ himself, as our Great High Priest, is already offering to the Father. Our imperfect prayers are gathered up into his perfect intercession. Our faltering praise is joined to his perfect declaration of the Father’s worth. Our weak faith is upheld by his perfect faithfulness.

Thirdly,

3. You are not a spectator watching a performance, but an active participant.

Understanding that we worship in heaven itself through Christ should transform how we view and participate in Christian worship. Let us consider several practical implications of this profound truth.

First, recognize the dignity and privilege of Christian worship. When we gather for worship, we enter the very throne room of God. Though we see only the visible church—perhaps a handful of people in a modest building—we participate in something far greater. We join the assembly of the firstborn, the great cloud of witnesses, and innumerable angels in glorifying God. This should fill us with holy reverence and unbounded joy.

Second, approach God with confidence. The author of Hebrews urges us to “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (10:22). We can have this confidence because *our access does not depend on our worthiness but on Christ’s perfect work*. He is our great high priest who has entered heaven itself on our behalf. When you feel unworthy to approach God, remember that you come not in

your own name but in Christ's. His blood has opened the way, and his intercession maintains our access.

Third, let this shape your preparation for worship. If you were granted an audience with a great king, you would prepare carefully. How much more should we prepare to enter God's presence! This means coming with hearts ready to receive, minds focused on heavenly realities, and wills submitted to God's purposes. Come expecting to meet with God, because you will.

Fourth, participate fully in worship. You are not a spectator watching a performance but an active participant. Do not be passive—you are part of something magnificent.

Fifth, let this heavenly perspective shape your daily life. If you are seated with Christ in heavenly places, if your true citizenship is in heaven, this should affect how you live Monday through Saturday. Your conduct should reflect your heavenly citizenship.

Finally, maintain an eternal perspective in trials. Paul reminds us that our present afflictions are light and momentary compared to the eternal glory that awaits us. When you gather for worship, you taste that glory already. When life feels overwhelming, remember that your true life is hidden with Christ in God, secure beyond all earthly threats.

We still live in earthly tents, groaning as we await our full clothing with heavenly glory. But the day is coming when faith will give way to sight. Then we will see face to face the One whom we now worship by faith. Until that day, let us worship with growing wonder that God has, through Christ, brought us into his very presence. Let us join with all the company of heaven in declaring, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" Amen.