

Prayer

We praise You for the gifts You have given to us Lord, they are awesome and amazing, empowering and life-changing, liberating and energizing, eye-opening and envisioning, beautiful and fabulous. You, Lord Jesus Christ, know how to give gifts to take the breath away! May we praise You all our lives by using these glorious gifts! AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Missions

Praise God for the growth of His Kingdom in our midst. There are many things we do not understand about missions, and we do not know why the Lord leads some to respond to His call and not others, for example. Nevertheless, pray, and continue to pray that the Lord might restore the church's enthusiasm for all forms of mission in the coming years.

Meditation

We feel free to travel around the world and do not think it a 'wonder':
But the wonders of the Lord never cease,
And His mercies to us never fail.

We talk to each other wherever we are, by email, text and mobile:
But our maker has always been ready to speak,
And He talks to us through His Word.

We see what goes on all over the world; wherever the camera goes:
But the eyes of the Lord see the human heart,
And He knows the truth of our deeds.

We like to think we fully control the environment in which we live:
But the fact of creation is God sustains all,
And He loves each soul He's made.

We presume to reckon that humanity will always have the last word,
But in truth, it's best if we leave it to God,
And He's waiting to say 'I love You!'

Bible Study - Hebrews 12:18-24

¹⁸ You have not approached touchable things; a blazing fire, darkness, gloom, a whirlwind, ¹⁹ a trumpet-sound and the sound of a voice; all of which made the hearers plead that no other words be spoken to them ²⁰ because they could not bear the command; 'If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.'²¹ Indeed, the sight was so terrifying that Moses said, 'I am trembling with fear.'

²² Instead, you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to countless thousands of angels gathered as for a feast, ²³ and to the church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood which speaks more eloquently than the blood of Abel.

Review

The letter of Hebrews is drawing to its close with words of great encouragement for all of God's people. In this passage, the encouragement is about worship, and it is delivered to us simply by means of a straightforward contrast; the old worship and the new. Verses 18 to 21 look back to recount what was probably the most revered act of worship of Almighty God in the Old Testament, the worship of the people of Israel as they approached Mount Sinai before the giving of the Ten Commandments. Verses 22 to 24 look forward to describe the vision of the great feast in heaven which is an inspiration for the New Testament worship of God here on earth. Our journey of faith has not brought us to a place where we practice worship like the fearsome meeting between God and His people in the Sinai desert, says Hebrews, but to worship full of joy and gladness which anticipates the heavenly feast to come!

There is no real choice, of course, because Christians rejoice in the hope of Christ's glory. Hebrews is addressing Christians, of course, so the reason for the dramatic contrast is this. Some Christians were holding on to religious practices which were rooted in the Jewish traditions of the Old Testament, whether it was the holding of the traditional feasts or a synagogue style of worship, we do not know. Hebrews says categorically that this will not do. Now that Christ has ascended in glory, worship is no longer about things which are 'touchable' (12:18). When the children of Israel came out of Egypt and eventually arrived at the foot of Mount Sinai, they had already tested God's patience profoundly, questioning whether God really wanted to save His people (see Exodus 16:3, 17:2,3) because of the harsh conditions of the desert. When they met God at Sinai therefore, there was a staggering gap between the holiness of God and the sinfulness of His people, and this is reflected in the description of how the Israelites were required to worship God at the foot of the mountain (Exodus 19, see verses 10-20). All the talk in our passage of the 'blazing fire, darkness, gloom, a whirlwind ...' (12:19f.) is a descriptive summary of Exodus 19. What happened at Mount Sinai was awesome and spectacular, and it climaxed in the giving of the Law to Moses (Exodus 20), but it was worship which emphasised the gap between God and His people, as did all the traditions of Judaism.

Hebrews calls on Christians to set aside the old worship not just because it is old, but because it is a reflection of God's relationship with people before Christ. Now Christ has come, lived, died, risen and ascended, we must worship Him not in hope, but in glory! Hebrews therefore paints an inspirational picture of Christ in glory, a vision which anticipates the new Zion, the city of the 'Living God' and the 'heavenly Jerusalem'. This is Hebrews' version of John's famous vision in Revelation; 'then I saw a new heaven and a new earth ... and I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming out of heaven ...' (Rev 21:1,2). This is God's re-creation of all things at the end of time, a certain glory of complete victory over sin and death, and the final destiny of all God's people who have faith in Christ. Moreover, text upon text of the New Testament indicates that when Christ comes in glory there will be a feast! Not the old harvest festivals of the Old Testament (or even the harvest festivals of present day Christian life!) but a wedding celebration feast of Christ and His Bride, the Church (Rev 18:22, 19:7, 22:17).

Hebrews gives us this vision (12:22-24) as an inspiration for our spiritual worship of God. It pictures a great angelic host and a 'church of the firstborn', which means those Christians who have died before us in faith and have gone before into heaven. The feast takes place in the presence of God as Judge of all (12:23) and Jesus 'the mediator of a New Covenant', whose blood is sufficient for all the sins of those who have placed their hope in Him.

When you worship God on Sunday, what do you have in mind? The performing of religious rituals? If so, you are perhaps being drawn back into worship based on 'touchable things' (12:18), and this is not your call. You and I, like all Christians, are called to offer a spiritual worship which looks forward to the hope of glory, secure in Christ!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group to what extent the worship in your church resembles that in the first half of this passage.
2. Discuss in your group to what extent the worship in your church resembles that in the second half of this passage.
3. How does the vision of a heavenly banquet inspire your worship today?

Discipleship

We do not only worship God on Sundays at church. We worship the Lord our God with our lives and in everything we do. The reading today suggests that worship is a 'collective' event involving many, but it is not the only description of worship in the New Testament. Think and pray about how your own life demonstrates the worship of God, at any moment or at any time. If you keep a spiritual diary, then make a note of what the Lord says to you about this.

Final Prayer

Jesus, the very fact that we can talk to You is a miracle of Your grace. Thank You for being big enough to hear all our prayers, and thank You for caring for each of us individually. It is beyond our understanding, and Your love is very real! Thank You, Lord Jesus; AMEN