

Worship – Getting Ready for Something Special

Most of us look forward to special events—times when we can set aside the humdrum, ordinary things of our everyday lives and do something exciting. In fact, when those special events are coming, we spend a lot of time getting ready for them. Think of all the planning and work that goes into preparing for the first day of school or for Christmas each year. Or consider all the time and effort that goes into planning a wedding. The more important an event is to us, the more we are willing to work hard to get ready for it.

In this series of lessons, we've seen that in worship, God's people are invited by the all-powerful Creator of the universe to meet with Him and get to know Him personally! What event could possibly be more important? And yet, since this event comes often—every week instead of just once a year or once in a lifetime—we sometimes forget how special it is. We need to be reminded of the “specialness” of worship so that we can prepare for it as we should.

The reason worship is so special is because God is so special. This “specialness” of God is what the Bible means when it says that God is holy—He is perfectly pure and set apart from all His creation. Exodus 15:11 says, “Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?” And in 1 Samuel 2:2, we read, “There is none holy like the LORD: for there is none besides you.” God is unlike anyone or anything else, and He is high above anyone or anything else, so every meeting with Him is special indeed.

Since worship is a special event, we should make sure we're prepared to worship in the best way we can. There are at least four things we can do to make our worship better each Sunday morning.

Read Exodus 20:8-11. In the fourth commandment, God declared one day out of every seven to be holy. That means that each week, one day is set apart to God. Many Christians even call it “the Lord's Day.” In order to better focus on God on His day, we should plan ahead, managing our time to avoid any last-minute distractions or problems that might keep us from worship. We can lay out our clothes on Saturday evening and even read the Scriptures or practice the hymns if we know them ahead of time. We can also pray before the worship service and ask God to prepare our hearts to meet with Him.

Read Matthew 5:23-24. It's possible that someone in the church family may have been hurt by something we've said or done. If we know that a brother or sister is troubled by our words or actions, we should apologize and seek forgiveness. If grudges are allowed to grow in the church, people may be distracted from worship.

Read Hebrews 10:19-22. If our consciences are bothering us because of our own sin, we won't be able to worship God as we should. Before we worship, it is good for us to ask the Holy Spirit to make us aware of any sin, so that we can confess it, claim Christ's forgiveness, and then come confidently into God's presence with a clean conscience.

Read Nehemiah 8:1-3. Nehemiah describes a gathering of God's people to hear the Word read and preached. The service lasted for hours, and yet Nehemiah says that “the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.” Paying attention for long stretches of time does not come naturally to most of us. We must prepare to be attentive. Getting enough sleep, clearing away things that might distract us or others, and listening as though God is speaking to us (because He is) can help us pay attention to the Word as it is read and preached on Sunday mornings.

Worshiping God is a joy, a privilege, and a blessing. We should look forward each week to gathering with God's people to offer Him the praise He deserves. Since we love God and want to worship Him in the best way we can, we need to get ready for the big event!

Hymn of Praise – “Holy, Holy, Holy”

The poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson called “Holy, Holy, Holy” the world’s greatest hymn. Among hymns, it is unusual in that it can be found in just about every hymnal, with the same text, and often as Hymn #1. Inspired by the Nicene Creed, Reginald Heber wrote this hymn to be used on Trinity Sunday. Barbara and David Leeman have pointed out all the groups of threes that appear in the hymn: three “Holies,” three names (Lord-God-Almighty), three worshipers (saints, cherubim, seraphim), three places (earth, sky, sea), three divine perfections (power, love, purity), and three times (wert, art, evermore – in other words past, present, future). The Leemans continue, “This hymn describes a God of such perfect purity that standing before Him would cause us to fall down in fear. . . Yet we sing with joy that He is merciful. . . This high and holy God is transcendent (apart from us) but also immanent (near us), inviting us to worship and love Him.”

1 Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee.
Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

2 Holy, holy, holy! all the saints adore Thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea.
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,
Which wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

3 Holy, holy, holy! tho' the darkness hide Thee,
Tho' the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see.
Only Thou art holy-- there is none beside Thee,
Perfect in pow'r, in love, in purity.

4 Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All Thy works shall praise Thy Name in earth and sky and sea.
Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

When we sing this hymn, we are transported to the throne room of God that Isaiah describes in Isaiah 6 and that John describes in Revelation 4. Let us sing with joy and reverence as we join the angels and saints in heaven to praise our Great God--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!