

Scripture Reading:

Micah 4: "1 Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. 2 Many nations shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the Word of Jehovah from Jerusalem. 3 He shall judge between many peoples, And rebuke strong nations afar off; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. 4 But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, And no one shall make them afraid; For the mouth of Jehovah of hosts has spoken. 5 For all people walk each in the name of his god, but we will walk in the name of Jehovah our God Forever and ever. 6 "In that day," says Jehovah, "I will assemble the lame, I will gather the outcast and those whom I have afflicted; 7 I will make the lame a remnant, And the outcast a strong nation; So Jehovah will reign over them in Mount Zion From now on, even forever...11 Now also many nations have gathered against you, who say, "Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion." 12 But they do not know the thoughts of Jehovah, Nor do they understand His counsel; For He will gather them like sheaves to the threshing floor. 13 "Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion; for I will make your horn iron, and I will make your hooves bronze; You shall beat in pieces many peoples; I will consecrate their gain to Jehovah, and their substance to the Lord of the whole earth.""

"Consecrated as Living Sacrifices"

Well, I have to tell you this week the toughest part of this message was choosing the text to read! This can be a problem with pastors, especially when you are doing a topical sermon because you might have your own idea of what you want to say & go looking for a good proof text. This was not the problem I was having: It was the abundance of texts that I could have used that made the final choice difficult!

We have come to the third message in our series on covenant renewal worship:

- We have come to the portion of the service we refer to as the consecration of God's people.

This is perhaps the most familiar portion of the service, even if the word is not, & is certainly the most universal in use among American churches today

- In almost all services; you will find singing, preaching, offerings and prayers being done each week

Unlike consecration, we are familiar with the terms used in the "call to worship" because we can relate to mom calling us to dinner. We know what it means to confess our sins and we certainly know that communion refers to the Lord's Table! When we come to our commissioning it is easy to relate that to the Great Commission.

- So what does it mean for God's people to be consecrated?

It means more than just being holy or set apart: It means being changed and prepared for service: In a word you could say maturity!

- So the text that I selected is intended to help us understand how serious what God does with us at this point really is:

Reflecting on our morning text:

-- How many are expecting the nations of the earth to start hammering those swords into plows any time soon?

-- How many of you think wars will cease?

Those are tough things to believe and yet this is the promise God has given: There will be real, tangible, and practical affects as the Kingdom of Jesus fills the whole earth under the influence of God's Spirit.

➤ **So how is that going to happen?**

God is going to use all those broken vessels, the sinners that He calls in and cleans up to do this work!

➤ **And part of what we need to understand is how difficult that task really is!**

For God to transform us from rebels to faithful Saints is in some ways even tougher to imagine than those swords being pounded into plows.

➤ **However, if most of the people in two nations are converted and changed, one should be able to begin imagining a cessation of war between them.**

It is changing the sinner that is tough, and so we should think again of that image the Prophet Ezekiel was given with the dry bones. We have been justified by the work of Jesus who came to save His people from their sins:

➤ **We have been brought back to life, the first resurrection that is referenced in the Book of Revelation.**

➤ **But just like God pictured for the Prophet, now we need muscle and blood and flesh and breath to be fully restored and that is the work of Sanctification by the Spirit.**

Just as we saw with being in God's presence and knowing our forgiveness, we can and do experience sanctification throughout all of our Christian walk as individuals.

➤ **But again, we also gather as the Body of Christ and are sanctified together on the Lord's Day in ways that we cannot do alone or even in small groups or as families.**

What we see and experience at the middle of our service could be viewed as the practical part of Covenant Renewal Worship. There are some in the reformed and evangelical circles who argue that having weekly communion and/or a focus on the other parts of the liturgy that we are studying could take away from the centrality of preaching the Word: One of the important hallmarks of the Reformation and Evangelicalism today. Ironically, I would argue that we actually enhance this centrality with Covenant Renewal Worship:

➤ **As we go through what we do during this time of consecration, we certainly do see the preaching of the Word as central.**

However, striving to worship as the Bible instructs us has meant that we have more Scripture, not less, at all points during our service and a right focus on our instruction from God's Word in this time of consecration.

Another way to think about the movement of God's renewal is that He calls us together and cleans us up with the call to worship and confession and absolution

After our time of consecration we are nourished at the table and sent back out to serve in the world.

It is what happens here during our time of consecration that is critical and very practical: It is here where we become the living sacrifices the Apostle Paul commands us to be. I will not have time in this single sermon to fully explain or illustrate how the many images in the Old Testament inform us about this time, but I hope that I can at least get you to see much of what is given to us in the Old Testament “through new eyes” as Jim Jordon would say.

While there are many sacrifices in the Old Testament and lots and lots of details, let me remind you that there are three major sacrifices that establish the pattern we see in our Covenant Renewal Worship... Paul in writing to the Hebrews goes to GREAT length to explain how all of this relates to the work of Jesus and how we CANNOT go back to the animal sacrifices now that Jesus has fulfilled them all...

- Remember, all of the Old Testament worship pointed forward to what Jesus would do and all New Testament worship celebrates and applies what Jesus has done!

The first major sacrifice was the sin offering: Here the focus was on the death of the animal and blood. This is remembered during our time of confession where we hear the Good News that Jesus has paid the price for our sins as THE sacrificial Lamb and that we are forgiven!

- The second major offering was the burnt offering or what should more accurately be called the Ascension Offering.

The focus here is not on the death of the animal or its destruction, but rather on its transformation. The priests are given meticulous instructions about how the animal is to be brought near to God, properly divided and placed on the altar at which point it is transformed into smoke that is taken up into the glory cloud of God as a sweet savor.

The final offering is the peace offering which is where the Saint who is forgiven and changed can now sit and enjoy a meal with God: We will focus on this next week with communion.

To properly understand the importance of consecration this week, we must be sure that we do not confuse the first two offerings. There is NO forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood and no one may attend the marriage feast without the proper wedding garment as we learned last week.

The animal’s death was not the focus of the ascension offering, but rather how it was changed: Thus forgiveness of our sins is not the end of the matter when God moves to renew covenant with us as His people. Jesus has paid the price for our sins and has entered the Holy of Holies in heaven which the tabernacle and temple were modeled after...

- Something Paul goes to great length in Hebrews four through ten to explain *[good homework]*

He speaks in chapter four about the Word of God being that sharp doubled edged sword that could divide between the bone and the marrow. The image of the Priests knife would certainly have come to mind to these Jewish listeners. Then Paul explains how Jesus is the Great High Priest going before us into the throne room of heaven

- Keep in mind what changes those animals in the O.T.: the knife & the fire... The Word & the Spirit!

Finally, Paul tells us NOT to forsake the assembling of ourselves together because we are to be those living sacrifices that the Great High Priest Jesus will now consecrate and prepare for service.

As we have been learning from the Book of Acts, Jesus has ascended to God’s right hand and sent the Holy Spirit to comfort and empower His bride who will now fill the earth with His Kingdom.

- With all of that in mind let's consider what is done during this time of consecration in the covenant renewal worship service.

Here at Church of the King we have just introduced a new song and readings to help us understand that after we hear the Good News that our sins are forgiven, we are taken by the Spirit, as those who are in Christ, before the very throne of God to worship and be instructed, to offer up our gifts and our prayers.

Come bless the father is based on Psalm 134 and is intended to remind us that, just as we see in Revelation chapters four & five, we are now standing before God ready to offer our worship and to receive blessings from our God. The Psalmist says that we are to bless our God, which is a hard concept for us to take in, but as forgiven sinners who are now robed in the righteousness of His Son Jesus, we are able to do this and it is a blessing for God to just see us in such a state.

The Psalmist also tells us that God will bless us: The God who made heaven and earth, so there are many powerful blessings to come! *[like swords being pounded into plows!]* So the first thing we do is to join with the hosts of heaven in singing the praises of our great God. In Revelation chapter five we are told that we sing a new song to the lamb: "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe & language & people & nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priest to our God, and they shall reign on earth."

Next we read a portion of Scripture in unison or responsively as we begin the process of being instructed by God's Word... But this is not just an academic class room like what we might find at a University or even a good Seminary. Here in the midst of God's renewal of His covenant, the Holy Spirit is going to use His Sword, the Word of God, to properly prepare us to be a sweet smelling savor before our Holy God and to serve in His Kingdom.

- I guess this is the point this week where we must again ask if we REALLY believe that this is what is happening to us?
- IF we do, it will change how we sing, how we read or listen, how we pray and how we give!

We see all of these things during this time of consecration and we must always learn to be more and more serious about what is taking place!

For example, we practice our music, we have many talented musicians that God has blessed us with and Roger challenges us to do more and more: But if you look at some of the Biblical examples, we have plenty of room to grow. *As some more homework, you might want to go back and read about the musicians who were present the day the Ark was brought up to the Temple, including the 120 priests with trumpets!*

Some churches follow a lexicon of Biblical readings so all of the Bible is read over a three year period during the worship services. We have chosen to focus on key passages that are instructive to the Saints and critical in our battle with the world today: For example we read the Law of God and the account of Creation on a regular basis.

- Then we sing a song of response and I read the morning text and preach the sermon.

This is perhaps the easiest place for some to slip into thinking they are just spectators...

Nothing could be further from the truth IF we really do believe that the Holy Spirit is with us using the Word of God to reorder and change us!

- This is the practical portion of the service not because I include the appropriate applications in my sermon but because we believe that the Spirit uses all of the message to transform us!

This is truly where we are filled with the Spirit, or slain in the Spirit or moved by the Spirit: Experiences many charismatic churches often try to achieve in other ways today.

- **It is also why the Word IS central:**

Not because everything points to the sermon, not because I got my three points, have a nice speaking voice or learned in seminary how to “move” people to make a decision

- **But because this is where the Spirit does His most extensive work to prepare us, to consecrate us for God’s service in this world.**

This is again an important place for the instruction of our children: Not only in terms of what they will hear and understand, but in their learning to be attentive and participating. Edith Schaeffer would often draw illustrations with her children and grandchildren to help them focus and understand what was being said: It can be as simple as training children to keep their attention focused on the pastor during this time of instruction. You will be amazed at how much even our young children will learn and we also try to keep them engaged with illustrations and/or questions they can understand... This is important because it also teaches the adults some of those critical lessons!

Obviously, many in our modern age are shocked to see our children present in the worship service... Especially a service that includes a thirty to forty minute sermon! It is important because we really DO believe they are in covenant with God & members of the Body of Christ, their obedience reflects proper training from their parents and the rest of us learn lessons about patience as parents deal with the times of testing that always come! It is also amazing to think how these same folks who don’t think children can handle such things have no problem taking them to a theater for a two hour movie! [with no bathroom breaks ☺] And of course, here again, we must be the ones setting the good example as their parents or as their sponsors!

After the sermon we continue our worship with a song of response and then read a passage of Scripture together focused on the importance of tithing and giving.

- **This is not something we focus on because God needs the money!**

Many churches downplay the offering not wanting to appear too materialistic and that removes a very practical and important part of our consecration. We will spend a great deal of time on giving and prayer as we continue our journey through Acts, so I will just touch on a couple of important points in our time this morning:

- **The giving of our tithe reminds us that ALL our increase comes from God’s hand!**
- **The giving of special offerings reminds us that we are part of the Body of Christ & have an obligation to help those in need**

We are not giving because God or even the church has needs, but we give so that we understand how God blesses us with material things so that we can use them for the advance of His Kingdom!

It is much the same when we come to our time of prayer: We are not praying so that God will get the latest update on what is happening here at Church of the King or come to know our needs...

- **We are praying because we are commanded to come before His throne boldly and learn to realize that the prayers of the Saints are a delight to God!**

In the New Testament both giving and prayer are seen as extensions of the Old Testament sacrifices that pointed to the finished work of Jesus:

Those sweet-smelling savors that go up before God like the smoke from those ascension offerings...

Phillipians 4:16 “ For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. **17** Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. **18** Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.”

Revelation 8:3 “Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. **4** And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. **5** Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake.”

- A powerful picture! One that should remind us of the importance of our prayers and why we should be praying along!

With both giving and praying, we again set the example for our children to follow:

- Do they see us as cheerful givers who are training them to do the same?
- Do they see us as faithful prayer warriors who are teaching them to be the same?

So what does all of this mean? What are we teaching and passing along to the generations to come? I have made the case that this is the practical part of the service...

- But how is it practical, what happens to us, what do we learn & how do we become properly equipped?
- Understanding our ascension and worship of God with our singing gives us the right focus for all of life, learning as Paul will declare to the Greeks at Athens, “In Him we move and have our being!”
- Our readings from the Scriptures and listening to the sermon brings knowledge & wisdom.

Here we learn the right ideas & lessons about how we are to live as those who trust & obey, those who love Jesus & keep His commandments... Can't do that if we don't know what they are!

- Tithes & offerings focus on our wealth, great or small, the practical stuff of life that is often ignored in ‘spiritual’ circles!

With the giving of our tithes & offerings in our time of consecration, we learn that God loves to bless His people and gives us the wealth and ability to serve in His Kingdom. And finally our time of prayer reminds us where our true source of power lies as the God who made heaven and earth receives and hears our prayers and our lives as a sweet smelling aroma!

- Right worship gives us a right focus for all of life...
- God's Word gives us knowledge & wisdom
- Tithes & Offerings remind us that wealth is a gift from God
- In prayer we see that true power comes only from the very throne of God...

Thus we should understand more fully the importance of the conclusion that Paul rightly states after his long treatise on worship in Hebrews chapter 10:19 “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, **20** by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, **21** and having a High Priest over the house of God, **22** let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. **24** And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, **25** not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”