

Worship: The Ultimate Priority of the Church - The Supreme Importance of Worship

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Bible Text: Ephesians 2:19-22
Preached on: Sunday, March 6, 2022

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the second chapter of Ephesians. We are continuing a topical series that we began a few weeks ago on the doctrine of the church, the subject of ecclesiology, how it's titled in the systematic theology books, but ekklesia is the Greek word for church, assembly of called out ones is what the word actually means. So we're looking at the doctrine of the church, what does the Bible teach us about the church, and we've been looking at this for several weeks and we come this morning to the title of the message, actually this is a two part series within the larger series, this is, "Worship: The Ultimate Priority of the Church." That's the title of this Sunday's message and next Sunday, the one we're planning to share next week. "Worship: The Ultimate Priority of the Church." Within that the theme today is "The Supreme Importance of Worship." Next week, we'll look at the prescribed pattern for worship. We're going to look at that next week, the concept of how God instructs us how he is to be worshiped. That's part of why we're making some of the changes that we're making to our order of service is we're trying to be more faithful to what God has shown us in his word. But that's next Sunday, the prescribed pattern. Today, the supreme importance of worship. That is the theme.

We see this in so many ways and one of the glorious ways we see it is the way the New Testament pictures what it means to be a Christian. You heard this earlier in the passage that James read before the service started in chapter 10 about us coming into literally the temple in heaven as it is, not the temple on earth that was a type of the temple in heaven that we through Jesus Christ come into the temple in heaven to be a true worshiper of God, that the essence of what it means to be a Christian is to be a worshiper. You are someone who has become a worshiper of God if you have come to Jesus Christ. And so that our ultimate priority individually and corporately is to worship. Worship is the ultimate priority of the church and so we see this as we look at Scripture and note the supreme importance of worship.

We see it in the image that is before us in Ephesians 2:19-22 which will serve as our jumping off point, our starting point. We'll be moving around a lot through the Scriptures this morning but we start here in Ephesians 2:19. It's important just to provide a little context. Paul is writing to the church at Ephesus which has a large contingent of Gentile believers and so he is commenting in chapter 2 and helping them understand the miracle of what God has done to bring Jew and Gentile into one worshiping community in the

church, that the dividing wall of hostility has been abolished, that that which separated Jew and Gentile is eradicated, that when you come to know God through Christ there is no division. We come in one body to worship God in communion with him and with each other and this is a miracle of divine grace. This is something that the world cannot fathom or understand.

So he's talked about how Christ has broken down the wall of hostility and this is the climax of this discussion in verse 19 to 22. He's particularly talking to the Gentiles who were formerly far off, separated from God, aliens to the covenants and not being able to hear the word of God. They had no access but now they do. Look in verse 19,

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

This is a glorious image in that when you look at all that Scripture says about temple worship, coming into the presence of God, there's so much here that to become a Christian, to be born again, to come to faith in Christ is to come to have a renewed relationship with God so that you become a true worshiper, and in becoming a true worshiper you become a part of a community of true worshipers called out from the world to worship, to live a life of worship, and in that we are all about helping one another in our main business. This is why we're here, to worship. Every moment of every day that's your calling and we come together to do that and to help one another do that, and the corporate gathering on Sunday is like the high watermark of the whole week where we actually are physically present together as people who have that new relationship with God and are able to come into the very presence of God, as it were; spiritually when we come to him we are, in some way we are in heaven with him. This is a mystery. Ephesians 2:5 talks about this, we are even now seated with Christ in the heavenly places.

So when we come to worship, we truly go behind the veil, we come into the very presence of God and every one of us who gathers together who has that relationship with God, we are doing that corporately and we're communing with God together, a part of his family, and the unity of that is something that the world cannot comprehend, that is one of the most powerful displays of the glory of God that has ever happened. We're going to see as we read later on, we're going to get to come back to this. We're starting here and we're going to come back to this passage a little later so I'm trying not to preach the whole message, my later points now. But anyway the point is this: worship is to be the ultimate priority of the Christian life. It's to be the ultimate priority of the church.

Let's go to the Lord and ask his blessing on us.

Our Father, we come to You aware of our inability to comprehend, these things are too wonderful for us. Lord, we are of yesterday and we know nothing but by Your Spirit and by Your word You grant us true knowledge and deeper understanding. Open the eyes of our hearts. Open our ears to hear, to see wonderful things from Your word and to treasure You, to love You, to worship You more rightly. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Worship: the ultimate priority of the church. The supreme importance of worship. I want us to, as we think about this, there's two main points today: the supreme importance of personal worship and the supreme importance of corporate worship. That's how the outline is going to flow today. The supreme importance of personal worship is our first point and we want to look at the whole of Scripture as we make the case that worship is the supremely important reality in every person's life, even those who don't know God, that's what they were meant to be doing, but certainly for the Christian the supreme importance of personal worship. The most important thing that you do at any moment in your life is worship. That's what you should be doing, you and I should be doing it every moment of our lives. We should be laboring to do as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God."

But two subpoints under the supreme importance of personal worship. I mean, look at the Bible, you see that this first point A under the supreme importance of personal worship, you were created for worship. You and I were created for the purpose of worship. We see this in Genesis, in the very beginning of the Bible, Genesis 1:26 and 27, look into the first three chapters particularly of Genesis we see this, but Genesis 1:26, the sixth day of creation. God comes to the apex of his creation and he says in verse 26, "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them," God spoke to them. In chapter 2 you see God speaking with man, working with man on the problems, I mean, creation is not yet finished. He's working out all of creation. Nothing's wrong, there's nothing that's not good except for one thing we're going to find out in verse 18, it's not good for man to be alone, but he's working things out and he's engaging the man in the process. Man is walking with God in the garden. God invites man to name the animals and so in chapter 3 we find the Lord coming down to walk with him in the cool of the day.

Man was made to fellowship with the living God. You were created for a living, breathing, personal relationship with God. In fact, the word "image" that's repeated in verse 26 and 27 three times, "image" means "to replicate; to reflect." God made man like him, in his likeness, in a way that he can relate to man like no other creature can. We are like God in some way. We have the capacity for spiritual relationship and we are to see God as he is. We're meant to see God as he is, to delight in the communion with God above everything else, and to enjoy his creation as a gift from him but in his presence. This is what we were created for. This is the beauty and glory of what man's high calling is and so we were created to worship, we were created to not only replicate but reflect

back to God the radiance of his worth, to see his glory and reflect it. There's something in this when Moses was in the presence of God and his face shone. He sees God and he reflects the glory of God. That even as a fallen man Moses still, there must have been something extraordinary about Adam and Eve before the fall that they could be with God and reflect his glory in such a magnificent way.

But it's to see and to know God. In fact, worship, I borrow most of this from John Piper. I've kind of edited a little bit myself but I think this is a pretty good definition. Worship is seeing God as he truly is in all of his beauty and in all of his glory and gladly reflecting back to him the radiance of his worth. To see God as he truly is in all of his beauty, all of his glory, and gladly reflecting back to him the radiance of his worth. You were created for that. You were created, it's in your DNA to worship. It's in your DNA to see God as he is, to delight in the glory and beauty of who he is, and to express that back to him in a communion, a oneness with him. A relationship, a living and real relationship. Worship is not mere form, it's in spirit and in truth. The depth of your soul communing with God because you are seeing him truly as he is. That's what you and I were created for.

We see this that if you won't worship God, the fact that you're created to worship is so evident and obvious, and if you don't worship God you will worship something. Everyone worships. We're made for worship. I mean, this is why, you know, Ted Tripp did a little bit on this when he was here in the fall, not at Providence but when he was doing our seminar on parenting. He talked about how unique it is that people, we like to watch people do things and when they do it well applaud. I mean, you know, we go to ball games and we watch these guys do tremendous things. I mean, our team, of course, we're pulling for but even if you see the other team do something amazing, you're like, "Man, that was a great catch." Sometimes you'll even have to just acknowledge that, "Man, that was awesome." But if it's your guy, you really get crazy about it. But he said none of the rest of creation does this. He says imagine you're up in Alaska and you go out to see the bears and the salmon and all of that, and you see a bunch of bears on the side watching one of the bears out and, "Big Brown is out there. Let's see what Big Brown is gonna do." And they're just watching, and when he catches a fish they all start clapping. "Way to go, Big Brown!" No other animal does that. We pay to watch people do things so that we can get excited about it and express from our hearts the worth of what we see.

This is why hero worship, people don't worship God, they worship heroes. They worship rock and roll singers. They worship actors and actresses. You cannot escape this. You will worship. The most hardened atheist will worship somehow the principle of natural selection. In fact, Romans 1 makes this painfully clear and so powerfully clear. Romans 1:18-25. The problem is when sin entered the world, we were disconnected from God. We became dead spiritually, blind spiritually, deaf spiritually. We cannot see God. We cannot hear from God anymore. Our hearts are dead. So we must worship something and in our sin we are determined not to worship the one true God. I mean, we, before you were saved, you might have worshiped God but you worshiped the gods of your own making. If you thought you were worshiping the Christian God, you were twisting the Christian God to be the God you wanted him to be. I mean, how often have you heard someone say something like, "My God wouldn't do something like that. My God would

not send people to hell for eternity. My God would not allow bad things to happen to good people." People say things like that. Now all of that, there's so much wrong in that statement but ultimately they're right about one thing: your god wouldn't do that because your god is a figment of your own imagination but the question is who is the true and living God?

When we really see the things that we wrestle with and we struggle with, it confronts us because of sin. We don't think rightly and so we tend to judge God but when you come to have your eyes opened and your heart opened to the Lord, you come to see that even those things that you found the most difficult to accept, once you humbled yourself and you looked to the Lord and you looked in his word, you're like, "Yes, everything He does is right and perfect." I mean, for instance it's good that God is holy and just, that he's a God who punishes evil. What kind of world would it be like if there was no punishment of evil, if evil could just run out of control over people? What kind of world would it be? God is good.

In Romans 1 he says in verse 18, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them." He's saying that even in our sin and our unbelief, we still have within our own nature the awareness of God. We know that God is in the fabric of our being because we were made in his image and likeness. The most hardened unbeliever knows in the secret place of his heart, though he denies it, though he's suppressing the truth in his unrighteousness, yet he cannot deny that which he knows, that there is a God and he is accountable to that God.

Verse 20, :For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened." You see, they didn't honor God. They didn't worship God. In our sin we don't honor God. Even though we know about him, we don't honor him and worship him. We turn aside and we become futile in our speculations.

Their foolish heart was darkened, verse 22, "Professing to be wise, they became fools," and what happens if you won't worship God, "and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen." This is what we do as sinners apart from the saving grace of Jesus Christ. We worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator but it does not change the fact that you were created to worship. That's why you worship the creature if you won't worship the Creator.

And this is why worship is so important but when you are alienated from true worship, what has to happen? You have to be saved. Your blind eyes have to be granted sight. Your deaf ears have to be opened so that you can hear and see. You need Jesus to give you eyes to see and ears to hear. The second point here, not only were you created for worship, but if you're a Christian you were saved unto worship. You were saved for the purpose of worship. I mean, you're saved from your sins but you're saved from your sins unto worship.

Look with me at John 4, familiar story of the woman at the well that Jesus encounters, a woman of Samaria, and he has a discussion about living water with her and he's telling her, "I'm the way to be saved. You need Me to give you living water more than I need you to give Me a drink of that water out of the well. You need Me to give you living water." He is probing her heart and he asks for her to go and call her husband because he knows that she doesn't live with her husband, she lives with a man who is not her husband. She's already had five husbands and the man she lives with now, Jesus says, is not her husband. She says that to this man, that she's never met this man, she comes up to the well, she offers to give him water or he asks her to, "Give me a drink." He's a Jew. She didn't even speak to him because a Samaritan knows that you're not supposed to speak to Jews because they looked down on you so much and the antipathy between their races was so great. But Jesus says to her, he starts the conversation, "Would you give Me a drink?" She draws the water and so then they have a conversation about this and he says living water and she's talking and he says, "Go call your husband." And she says, "I don't have a husband." And he says, "You've said rightly. You've had five husbands and the man you live with now is not your husband." He tells her that about herself and she says, "Sir, I perceive You are a prophet." And like all good sinners, what she does is immediately try to escape and change the subject. "Let's not talk about my immorality. Let's talk about a theoretical theological question. Is it right for, You're a Jew, is it right for us to worship on Mount Gerizim, that's what we Samaritans believe, we worship on Mount Gerizim, You worship in Jerusalem, where is it that we should truly worship?" And Jesus says to her in verse 21, "Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know,' Samaritans are wrong, you aren't worshipping God, 'we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.'" Look what he says in verse 23, "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." "I have come," he says, "to make it so that you don't need to worship at a particular place. I am the place," Jesus is saying. "You come to Me and I will make you a true worshiper, someone who can worship in spirit and truth." Not just with the right doctrine, that's truth, but also from the heart, that's spirit. Not just from the heart without the right doctrine. No, from the heart with the right doctrine. Truth produces worship from the heart. Spirit and truth.

But you see this, there's a sense in which he says, "The Father is seeking worshipers." Jesus' mission, in a sense according to this passage, "Go into the world and bring Me some worshipers. Deliver people from the darkness and dominion of their false worship.

Bring them back to Me as true worshipers." Because we were created for worship. And so then you're saved to worship.

I'll mention a passage, we're not going to turn there for the sake of time but Romans 12:1, a very familiar passage where Paul says, "I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." He basically is saying in Romans 12:1, as you look at the mercies of God, this is how you're to live your life on a daily basis. You're to keep focused on the mercy of God in salvation, what he's done for you in Jesus Christ, the fact that you have come to know the living God, and because of that now you live your life as a priest. That's the imagery that is replete in verse 1 of Romans 12. Offer your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable. All these words "holy, acceptable, sacrifice, your spiritual service of worship," all of these are words of the temple. He's saying that the Christian is to see himself as a priest, that is, from the moment you wake up until the moment you go to bed, you are performing the action of worship. Everything. Your personal life, my personal life is to be lived in worship and the way that you do that is to continue day by day, moment by moment, to be seeing God as he truly is in all of his beauty, all of his glory, and gladly reflecting back to him the radiance of his worth. That's what Paul's saying. In view of his mercies, with his mercies in view, seeing how his mercies show you the glory of who he is, the wonder of his love, the infinite nature of his lovingkindness, now reflect back to him the radiance of his worth, how wonderful God is. And the way you do that is you live as a priest, not a literal priest making real sacrifices, you sacrifice yourself. The idea is that we delight so much in who God is, you can think of this as delighted adoration giving way to joyful surrender. This is the way to live, delighted adoration giving way to joyful surrender; to keep our mind so focused on God and his character as supremely revealed in Christ and his cross work that we're delighted in our adoration and that just leads to joyful surrender. We lay everything down at his feet. "Anywhere You want me to go, anything You want me to do, whatever You want to take, whatever You want to give, it is my joy to surrender to You."

Everything. It doesn't earn salvation. No, it's not that at all. It's because you have been saved. It's because you have received mercy that you surrender. You don't surrender to be saved. You can't. It's impossible. Repentance is granted. Faith is a gift but you go to Jesus and you plead with him to give you the gift of repentance. You look to him and you take him at his word when he says, "I will save any who come to Me." And out of the joy of that, then you lay down your life and that's what we're all called to. That's what we're called to do every moment of every day. Driving in your car. At work or school. Trying to keep our minds continually setting our mind on the things above, not on things below. Good things happen and we're thanking God. Bad things happen, we're thanking God not for the bad thing itself but for what he's doing in it. "Reminding me of how much I need You, Lord. Thank You." And just surrendering.

That's what we're called to. That is the calling of every Christian. That is the supreme importance of personal worship. There's no better way to live and when you do that, you are doing exactly what you were created to do. I mean, you are in, when you really know the Lord, if God has worked in you and he's dealing with you in deep ways, he's digging

into your heart and you are able in some moment out of delighted adoration to joyfully surrender to him, there is nothing that thrills the soul of a human being like that. Pleasing to God, delightful in his eyes, well-pleasing to him.

The supreme importance of personal worship. Secondly, the supreme importance of corporate worship. The Bible teaches us this clearly as well. It's not just about you following Jesus, me following Jesus and we're all independent lines, you know, parallel lines walking toward heaven. No, that's not it. When you come to Christ you come to a community of faith. You become a part of the body of Christ. The image that's used, Ephesians 4; 1 Corinthians 12; organically connected to every other person but the image that we've seen today and we're going to focus on this morning is you become part of the temple. That's what we saw in Ephesians 2. And the keyword, I mentioned earlier at the very beginning the word "ecclesia, ecclesia, e-c-c-l-e-s-i-a" is how it's transliterated. Ek means out, clesia is from kaleo, called out. It literally means called out ones. It's a called out assembly, a mass of people, the ecclesia are those who are called out, authoritatively called out for a purpose. The emperor or a governor would call people to an ecclesia, an assembly. You have been summoned to be a part of this. This is the word for church. This is the word translated "church" or "assembly" in the New Testament. The word is used 114 times in the New Testament. Jesus said, "I will build My church upon this rock and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." It's this word.

So to come to Christ is to be called out of darkness into his marvelous light. It's to be called out of the world system and its values, its way of life, to be called into a new community that is devoted to worship, the worship of the living God. And I want us to think about this under some subpoints. The first is I want us to look at how this is true from the beginning. You see this, this is the divine plan of God for all of history. You see it as you walk through the Bible and I want to, first of all, first subpoint under number 2 is: Old Testament shadows. Old Testament shadows and the next point is going to be New Testament substance. So what I'm going to show you is God was teaching us as the Scriptures unfold, as God gives us his word, what he does is he tells us in 1 Corinthians 10 and also in a place in Romans too, 15 I think it is, that he does things in the Old Testament to teach us things. Really clear in 1 Corinthians 10 that he's doing this. Then you see like in Hebrews 11 that he tells you that there were these types going on, Hebrews 4 as well, that God was doing things in the Old Testament that were typological, that is, they were shadows like shadows that come before the substance. You're standing at a corner and you see a shadow come and you know somebody's walking right behind that shadow, don't you, if you see a shadow coming? If you don't, you may be in trouble. I don't know what that means if you see a shadow without a substance.

If there's a shadow, there's a substance and so the Old Testament shadows lead to the New Testament substance but, first of all, the Old Testament shadow of this fact that God, the ultimate priority of God's people is worship, that God's ultimate purpose in the world is to call out people to be true worshipers of him and to do so in a corporate nature. This is what's important. We've already covered individual but this even higher sense of calling is not that you do it 1:1 with God but that you become part of a community. Now you must become a worshiper 1:1 with God. You must personally repent and believe the

gospel. God is seeking individual worshipers but they don't remain individual worshipers. After you come to be a worshiper, you come to be a part of the temple of God.

Now the Old Testament shadow. Look with me at Exodus for a minute, chapter 19, the second book in the Bible, Genesis, Exodus. Exodus 19:3-6. This is after the Passover. God has sent Moses and Aaron down into Egypt and they have delivered the people of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. Now they're at Mount Sinai and God tells them what his purpose is for them. Verse 3, "Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel." I called you out to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. I went into the world and I called you out to now be a part of my priesthood. I want you to be a people devoted to worship, the worship of God.

And the picture is really striking. As you read on through Exodus, you're going to see the Lord gives them the regulations of the tabernacle. The tabernacle was the first meeting place that God gave to man. It was a tent, also called the Tent of Meeting, that is, the appointed place to meet with God. It was a tent that God gives with great detail and specificity, painstaking detail exactly how every part of the tent is to be made. Exodus 25-30, he talks about the tent, the poles that hold up the tent. He talks about everything in the tent, outside the tent, all around the bordering curtains that surround the tabernacle courtyard. Every meticulous detail given with great specificity.

Then after they complete the work he then says, he gives them great, that's Exodus 25-30 and then 35-40 picks up again the actual fulfillment of what he told them to do in 25-30 they do in 35-40. Then in Leviticus right after that, the next book is Leviticus, and so there's not any time gap. They go right to the next thing. Okay, now that you've got the tent ready, let me tell you about the sacrifices that you must do. You see, for you to become a worshiper of God as a sinner there must be blood spilt because sin is such a great and heinous offense to a holy God and you and I are heinous offenders. So he gives in the first six chapters of Leviticus five different offerings that must be offered with great specificity, great detail. The priests then go through what they're told to do to purify themselves which is also in great detail. They have to offer sacrifices for themselves. They have to put their own hands, look at this imagery and I encourage you to read Exodus and Leviticus and read it really concentrating for the pictures. The details can overwhelm you, so much about how many, you know, cubits and exactly what's being done here and there but you've got to step back and look at the big picture and one of the big picture elements is that what happens is over and over again when a sacrifice is offered, the people offering the sacrifices are to put their hands on the head of the animal. And so where the priests, when they were to be purified they put their hands on the head of a bull, then they put their hands on the head of a ram, and hands on the head of a second ram, and this bull and these two rams are sacrificed, they are killed. What's happening? Their sins are transferred to the substitute, to the sacrifice, and the sacrifice

dies in their place and that enables sinners like Aaron and his sons to then become priests, and then what they start doing is they offer sacrifices for the people. The same thing, people bring the animal and so often the instruction is put your hands on the head of the animal before it's sacrificed.

Well, they do this, they're given all these rules and then right away they do it and what happens is the Lord's glory fills the tabernacle and so the people now have given all these regulations of how they can come to worship God but it's so beautiful because the tabernacle, this tent is to be in the center of the camp. They camp around it and so what God is teaching us in this shadow is that he called out people out of Egypt, out of the place of darkness, he called them out to be worshipers, to be in the presence of God, to orient their life around worship. The Tent of Meeting is at the center because the Tent of Meeting is the only thing that ultimately matters. It's all about knowing God and these people are set apart, and this is the Lord even reaching out to the unbelieving nations, "Look here at My people. Look at who I am, the living God. And these people, this is how you're meant to live. You're meant to live life oriented all around, to orient every part of your life around worship, true worship." That's the word picture that's being played out in the Old Testament. It becomes a permanent temple under Solomon. Still the nation of Israel orient their lives around the place to meet God, the temple. Now as I said, it's a permanent building. The Tent of Meeting goes away, it's replaced by the temple.

We saw how this was even true even after the nation ceases being a nation. This is the whole point of Ezra-Nehemiah. Remember as we looked at that, they're living under Persian hegemony. Babylonian hegemony becomes hurt. Persia rule. They're no longer a nation. But that's okay, the most important thing is still there. Rebuild the temple, orient your life as a community no longer as a nation, a physical nation with a flag. No, a spiritual nation with a temple. Orient your life around the worship of God. That's how we're to live and that's a picture for us. It doesn't matter who's in charge of the nations of this world, the people of God are called to build all of their lives around worship.

So when Jesus comes seeking worshipers because those images could not fully deliver us to be true worshipers, they were pictures of what had to happen. The blood of bulls and goats cannot make you right with God but there was one born of a virgin, sinless, spotless. When John the Baptist saw the Lord Jesus Christ, he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." You see, he's the Lamb of God and God's going to place our sins, as it were, our hands on his head, our sins translated, transferred to his account and he will pay the price for them, and in his death we are then brought literally into the true presence of God. When Jesus does it, that's the whole argument of the author of Hebrews, it's so beautiful as we read from Hebrews 10 earlier, Jesus went not behind a veil that was made according to the pattern of what Moses saw. Apparently God on Mount Sinai showed Moses, somehow opened his eyes to see what the temple in heaven is like and he said, "You make this temple, this tabernacle exactly like that." The same pattern exactly after the true temple. But Jesus didn't go into the one patterned after it, the copy, like the high priest did year after year, year after year taking blood again and again, that high priest dies, a new high priest comes and he does the same thing year after year until he dies, then another high priest comes, year after year. No, Jesus entered

behind the veil, the true veil in heaven once for all and offered his blood as a perfect sacrifice delivering those who looked to him forever from all of their sins past, present and future wiped out for good.

And in doing that, he brings you now into the priesthood. We are in, as it were, before God, living before God even though we're in this world, somehow spiritually we're living before God, the Holy Spirit in us, trusting in Christ, we are somehow communing with the Lord and we are to devote our lives, center our lives around worship and corporate worship is the ultimate expression of that because God was telling us in the type, the Old Testament type, it's not just one person at the tabernacle, it's my people surrounding the tabernacle.

And when you come to the New Testament, the second point, the New Testament substance, let's look, first, at 1 Peter 2:4-5, "And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God," Peter is writing to a group, a mixed group of Gentiles and Jews who were believers just like Paul was talking to in Ephesians 2, he said, "You are coming as a living stone." And you also, I mean, he's a living stone who was rejected by men, choice and precious in the sight of God, but, "you also as living stones, are being built up," upon him, "as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." He says all of the Old Testament imagery is fulfilled now in the people of God in the New Testament church. You and I are living stones, a living stone that's to be a part of the temple is not doing any good off on the side over here by itself. It's meant to be built upon and built into the church. There's something about the corporate worship of God that God delights in. He delights in his people and he delights in bringing his people from every tribe and tongue and kindred from every kind of background to be one in his presence and because we're one in his presence because we love Jesus. I love Jesus, you love Jesus, then we love each other. We can't help it. We love Jesus in each other.

So we become one and that's exactly back to Ephesians 2, I said we were going to come back there, we're going to finish here. Ephesians 2 where we started. Verse 19, Ephesians 2, "you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household." He blends us together. You're of God's household. It's family. You're part of the household of God but then he says, "Let's talk about that household. You're been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." He's saying that when the people of God come together, loving God, each of us with access to God through Jesus Christ, when we come together there's a sense in which we are the dwelling of God, God comes down and dwells with us in a way that is greater, the sum of the parts, I mean, the sum is greater than the sum of the parts. When we come together, it is greater. There is more of God's presence here than you can have on your own, way more. You can have moments where God really shows his glory. I'm not saying that, the Spirit can work in our lives in wonderful ways but it's his ordained way to manifest his glory in corporate worship. When we get together, we rub

elbows with each other, we work through life together and we praise God together. This is the highest moment that you can be involved in this side of heaven.

Nothing else is anywhere close to this. This is why it's so important. It's the ultimate priority and we must remember this. This is something that we were challenged to think about as we dealt with the whole thing with COVID and some needed to be away and we understand that, you needed to take responsibility because you were caring for others, because you were protecting yourself because you're a high risk person or whatever. But if you have a right value system and you make that good decision to stay home, your heart should be broken over it and our hearts should be broken that you're not here. And as soon as we can get back together, we need to be urgently getting back together, worshiping God together because this is where his glory shines the most brightly. All of history pointing to this and then from this to the ultimate fulfillment when the temple of God when the bride is brought down from heaven, the new heavens and the earth and God dwells in the midst of her. Heaven is the fuller expression of what we're experiencing now but we're experiencing something that is so far above anything that anyone in the past could imagine. Sometimes we wish we'd been an Old Testament saint, be like Moses and see God. If Moses could be here today, he'd say, "No, you're crazy. You're in a much better place than I ever was. You have this whole book. You have now the Holy Spirit indwelling you in a way that we did not. You commune directly with God. You go behind the veil in a way that we didn't yet, even though God saved us. We could not experience the fullness of what you experience." And when you gather together as the ecclesia of God, the called out ones, God's glory is able to rest upon you. Now there's a measure of according to your faith so be it done unto you. Part of the problem is we don't believe this enough, that's why we don't experience all that he wants us to experience. We need to believe his word. We need to prioritize these things.

I love what he does and I'm going to summarize this, I encourage you to read it, chapter 3. This is just amazing, he explains that this whole thing of God making a temple of worshiping community out of various and different people and making them one, particularly Jew and Gentile, the greatest division of all is a division between Jew and Gentile. He calls it the mystery of Christ. Chapter 3, verse 4. "By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ," verse 5, this mystery "which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit." What is the mystery? First of all, "mystery" in the Bible is something that was hidden that is now made known. It's not something that we still don't know about. It's not an unsolved mystery. "Mystery" in the Bible is that which was, it was anticipated, it was talked about but it wasn't fully described or experienced until now.

What was the mystery? Verse 6, this is the mystery, "to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." This is the mystery: God always intended to save the Gentiles and the Jews together. He always intended to save people from the farthest distance apart, social background, economically. He always intended to save them and

bring them to oneness in his presence. This was the mystery. This is the glory of what Christ does.

And we can't read all of it but look at verse 9, "to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places." And this is just so awesome. The manifold wisdom of God, literally the very much variegated, that's what it says in the Greek. It's a variegated is the word, like multicolored, and then he adds an adverb on the front of it or an adjective on the front of it to say the very much multicolored wisdom of God has now being made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places. What he's saying is this, that the demons, Satan's kingdom, and in some sense even true probably of the angels, as they watched history unfold, they've seen the wisdom of God. They've marveled at the wisdom of God and the way he called Abraham, what he did with Moses and the Egyptians, what he did with David, Solomon, what he did with Ezra and Nehemiah. They've seen the manifold wisdom of God but when it comes to this, when it comes to all kinds of people now from various backgrounds coming together corporately to worship Jesus Christ in the Spirit together, in one place, the demons of hell behold the manifold wisdom of God in a way that they've never seen before. God's wisdom transcends their ability to comprehend it when you and I worship in oneness before the throne of Jesus Christ.

The demons in hell know their day is coming. When you and I worship, spiritual power is manifested and we are attacking the gates of hell. That's why Jesus said, what did he say? "Upon this rock I will build My church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." So often, I know I just misunderstand this. It's like I thought the gates of hell are always coming for me, you know, like they can overcome you but the gates don't charge. We charge the gates. He's saying the gates of hell can't stand against the church, the people of God called out to be his holy worshipers. When we worship God no matter what's going on in the world, the gates of hell can't stand against that.

That's what our calling is. What an opportunity. Isn't that amazing that God is doing something so awesome and you and I look at it, it doesn't seem that impressive. I mean, honestly we look at each other and you look at me, I look at you, we look at one another and we're like, "This doesn't seem like, I mean, it's good and everything but it's not that great." Don't you feel like that a lot of times? I mean, we see each other in our weakness, our failings, so much not like Christ, three steps forward, two steps back. But the reality is this is who we are.

I love one of the quotes from "Screwtape Letters" where Lewis is talking about, demons are talking among themselves, Screwtape talking to his nephew Wormwood and he says to him, he's telling him how to manage this new Christian that is his patient, demons talking strategy about how to deceive and mess up the life of this patient. He says, Screwtape says to Wormwood, he's telling, Wormwood tells him apparently about some things that are happening in the church that are causing his patient to stumble. After some initial infatuation, he got saved, he came into the church, he was excited about all these

wonderful people, he's been there a while and he's not that excited about them anymore. I mean, he can see that they've got problems just like me and this is what Screwtape says to Wormwood, demon talking to demon. He says, "Yes, that's good. The church can be a very effective weapon in our hands." He says, "Not the church as you and I see her. Not the church as you and I see her spread out through the centuries and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners." He says, "Fortunately the people, the humans can't see that. You and I see it, they can't. They just see each other, you know, with the various foibles they have, hair out of place, life messed up in some ways. They just see all the problems but you and I see the reality." That is the reality. We are God's church. We are not anything of ourselves but we are what Jesus Christ has made us. He is building his church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, and worship is the most valuable thing that we can do, gathering together to give our hearts to God in worship, uniting together in worship. This is the zenith, this is the power place for the Lord to advance his work in all of our lives.

In thinking about applying this, is worship your first priority? Are you a worshiper of God? Have you come to know Jesus Christ? Are you truly a worshiper of God? He will make you one. You come to him today, he says, "I will not cast out any who come to Me. Come unto Me, you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." Go to him today. Let him make you a worshiper. Confess to him that you're worshipping all the wrong things, that you don't have the ability to change yourself but go to him asking him for faith, being willing to obey as he gives you grace, and then realize that our job every day, every moment, is to worship God. That is, no matter what happens tomorrow, do you know what your job is when it happens? To worship God. Things go bad at work, your job is to worship God with things going bad at work. You get a bad diagnosis at the doctor, your job is to worship God in that bad diagnosis. Now listen, it's had for us all to do those things, that's why we have to be together and help each other. Love each other, mourn over the difficulties we need to mourn over, and then remind each other it's all about worship. As we worship God in the midst of these things, God's kingdom goes forth and his glory is made known.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for the glory of the salvation that You have made known to us in Jesus Christ. We're thankful that we don't come to You in our own righteousness, in our own energies, but we have to come through the blood-sprinkled path of Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. We pray for those that are here that need to repent and believe the gospel, that need to become true worshipers of You. Grant them grace even now to surrender everything to Christ, to believe His promise and receive from Him faith, repentance. And Lord, help us keep receiving more and more faith, more and more repentance, and help us become truer and truer worshipers for You are worthy of that kind of wholehearted worship. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.