

# Instruction, Instruments, and Incense

## The Worshipping Church Part 7

Revelation 5:1-8      2-21-2012

Summary: Prepare your affections, then behold His glory (by listening to preaching), then respond with celebration and praise, and that praise will rise to God as a sweet-smelling incense, which the twenty-four elders combine with instrumental music in their worship.

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**Revelation 5:1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" 3 But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. 4 I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. 5 Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." 6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. 8 And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. 10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." 11 Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. 12 In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" 13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" 14 The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.**

# Instruction

## ***Worship is a Response to Seeing God's Glory***

The book of Revelation begins with an introduction, then the letters to the churches in chapters 2-3, and then the Apocalypse. And the Apocalypse portion begins in a surprising way - two full chapters of worship. In Revelation 4 and 5 nothing is said about anything happening on earth. It all takes place in heaven, where there are two worship scenes – one in chapter 4 (where the focus is on the Father), and one in chapter 5 (where the focus is on Jesus). And in both chapters, there is no worship in the first half of the chapter. In chapter 4 we saw that the first half of the chapter just focuses on the glory of God. And then, in response to that, comes the worship in the second half. And chapter 5 is the same way. The first half of the chapter just shows us the glory of Christ and His worthiness, and then, in response to that, comes the worship.

## ***The Role of the Sermon***

And from that we learn the most important principle about worship: all true worship is a response to seeing the glory of God. All true doxology comes from theology. And all true theology leads to doxology. And when we talked about that in chapter 4, I made the point that this is why it is so important that we have songs and hymns with rich, deep, theological content. And it is why we have lots of Scripture readings during our singing time. And it is why we focus our prayers during the singing time on the attributes of God. But the one part of this that I have not discussed yet is the role of preaching in corporate worship.

## ***Shows the Glory of God***

The sermon is the most important part by far of the corporate gathering. It is the main way we see the glory of God. That is one reason why when you read the New Testament, you see a little bit about singing in the corporate gathering, and you see a whole lot about preaching. Singing is important. If God says something once, it is important. But if He says something over and over – that is *really* important. And the centrality of the preaching of the Word of God in the corporate gathering is far more heavily emphasized than the singing – because without seeing the glory, there is no true praise.

When we sing about God's holiness, or love, or wisdom, or power, or any other attribute of God, our worship is only as deep as our understanding of those attributes. And it is through accurate, thorough, in-depth, passionate, enthusiastic preaching that we gain our understanding of His attributes. So the sermon is really a key component of our worship. When we are listening to the sermon, we are in the first half of Revelation 4, where the focus is on the glory of God. And all worship springs forth as a response to seeing that glory.

Much of the debate today regarding worship is if we should have an inward focus, or an outward focus. Some people are saying, "We have too much focus on building up the saints. We need to turn our focus outward and become missional and reach the world." But in the Bible we see that the priority of the church is not outward nor inward, it is *upward*. The biggest favor we could ever do the world, and the biggest favor we could ever do the saints, is to fix our attention on the glory of God and showcase that glory in our lives.

## *Ezra*

In Nehemiah 8 we have the account of what happened when the Jews returned to the land of Israel after seventy years of captivity in Babylon.

**Nehemiah 8:1 all the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel. 2 So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand.**

I don't know where those who could not understand went. Maybe they had children's church.

**3 He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law. 4 Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. ...5 Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. 6 Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.**

**7 The Levites ... instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. 8 They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.**

So this went on from sunrise until noon. For six or seven hours you have Ezra reading, evidently with pauses so that the Levites could explain the meaning to the people around them, then more reading and more explaining all morning long. This chapter is our model for preaching – read the text, then explain what it means and the significance for life.

And what was the response? Worship. The people listened attentively, then lifted up their hands and shouted Amens and bowed and worshipped with their faces to the ground. And then they wept over their sins, and then rejoiced over God's forgiveness and had a huge celebration where they were commanded to eat and drink and give gifts. Then in the next chapter, on another occasion, it happened again.

**Nehemiah 9:1 On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting ... 2They confessed their sins ... 3 They read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshipping the Lord their God.**

**4 the Levites ...said: "Stand up and praise the Lord your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting." "Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. 6 You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host...**

And they go on and on and on in praise for the rest of the chapter, just praising God for all the great things He has done from the creation until that day. That is our model – read and preach the Word of God to show the glory of God, and that is the basis for worshipping God.

### ***Worship in the Way You Listen***

So hearing God's excellencies proclaimed each Sunday morning enables our worship. But it does not only enable worship. If we do it right, it is worship. Worship is when you honor God as God. And when you listen to His Word in the right way, you are honoring Him as God.

You are not honoring Him as God if you just come to learn. If all you care about is gathering some more information so you can be more educated about the Bible, that is not worship. But if you listen with a humble, eager, receptive heart – a heart that says, "God, I am here because I want to subordinate my will and my thoughts to your will and your thoughts, I am here because I want to honor You by feasting on the banquet that comes from Your Spirit through Your Word, I am here to look to You for that which I can get nowhere else, I am here to glorify You by finding my full

satisfaction in You,” then you are honoring God as God and that is worship.

Although – let me just throw this in for what it is worth – I know there are some pastors who get really bent out of shape if you distinguish between the worship time and the sermon. They do not want you to refer to the singing time as the worship time, because everything we do is to be worship, including the sermon. But personally, I do not get too worked up if someone refers to the singing and praise time as the worship time, because that is the time when our attention is most directly focused on God. When you are involved in fellowship and ministry to others, that is pleasing to God, but your attention is divided between God and the person you are talking to. And the same is true of preaching. You have to use your mind to understand what is being said, so you are limited in how much time you can spend actually attending to God directly. But in the praise time, we do everything we can to eliminate distractions so that we can spend the entire time paying direct attention to God. And in that sense, it is the purist kind of worship – though certainly not the only kind.

## Instruments

OK, I plan to look at the specifics of the first half of chapter 5 next week (and, Lord willing, we will wrap up this series then), but for now let’s take a look at verse 8 where yet another aspect of praise is introduced.

**8 And when he had taken [the scroll], the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp**

Up to now the worship has been voices, bowing, and presenting gifts to God. But now we see another tool of praise – musical instruments. Each of the twenty-four elders had a harp. Harps were an instrument of celebration and rejoicing. For example, in Job 30:31 the harp is seen as the opposite of mourning and wailing.

**Genesis 31:26 Then Laban said to Jacob ... 27 Why did you run off secretly? ... Why didn't you tell me, so I could send you away with joy and singing to the music of tambourines and harps?**

**Psalms 43:4 Then will I go ... to God, the joy of my rejoicing. I will praise you with the harp**

In Isaiah 24:8 – when God brings His judgment on the world, it says the sound of the harp will cease. At least in the world it will cease. But after the Judgment is over, it begins again and continues forever.

**Revelation 15:2 ... those who had been victorious over the beast... held harps given them by God 3 and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb**

That’s us.

So the original readers would have seen the word *harp* and thought, *celebration*. Modern day harps are not really thought of that way. They are beautiful, but not really festive. I don’t know what instrument comes to your mind when you think of festivity and joy, but I am thinking ... the banjo. How many banjos have you ever heard at a funeral? The banjo is an instrument that, even if you do not really like banjo music, when you hear a skilled banjo player your foot will start tapping whether you want it to or not. That is the connotation the people back then had with a harp. We will spend eternity in heaven, not being lulled to sleep by modern day harp music, but rejoicing and shouting for joy with foot-stomping praise.

Have you ever heard the song “Dueling Banjos”? If you type that into Google the first result that comes up is a clip from the movie Deliverance where they did that song with a banjo and a guitar. If just listening to that song does not put you into a good mood, you are in a really bad mood. But the worship in heaven starts not with two dueling banjos, but with twenty-four dueling harps. And then later on it explodes into the music of millions of harps. And the sound of that will be deafening.

**Revelation 14:2 And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. 3 And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders.**

In heaven there will be thunderous, joyful, foot-stomping instrumental music forever.

In the Old Testament Temple, you know how many full-time musicians they had? (And when I say full-time, I am talking about priests who were exempt from all the other work of the priesthood because they were responsible to focus on music day and night.) There were 4000 professional instrumentalists (1 Chr.9:33, 23:5). Just the trumpet section had 120 trumpets (1 Chr.15:12). And Hebrews 8:5 says it was like that because it was a model of what is in heaven.

There are some denominations who believe we should have no instrumental music in our corporate praise time. They say, "All that stuff about harps and drums and trumpets and tambourines – that all died out with the Old Covenant." I would like to ask those people – what is it about Jesus' death on the cross and the arrival of the New Covenant that would require the end of instrumental praise? And why are there musical instruments in heaven? Why would that aspect of musical praise be so important in the Old Covenant, go silent in the New Covenant, and then re-emerge in the eternal state? There is no rational reason to assume that. Praising God with instrumentation is appropriate at all times in all places.

In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that is the reason musical instruments exist. How often, in Scripture, is a musical instrument ever used by a believer for anything other than worship? It happens, but it is extremely rare. The main purpose of music is praise. If you know how to play a musical instrument, use it to praise God. I keep asking the Lord to give us an orchestra – even if it is only once a year, so we could praise God with full orchestration and volume and with the variety and complexity and harmonies that come with multiple instruments.

This is one reason why we have the Sonshine ministry at Agape. We offer music lessons for voice and instruments to anyone who wants to learn, and we charge about half what it normally costs for private lessons, and included in the lessons is instruction about principles of worship so the next generation can praise Him with skill.

The world is serious about music. They need it for their entertainment. But we have far greater reason than that to be serious about it.

## **Incense**

So worship is based on instruction, expressed through instrumentation, and also one other tool. The Elders have two different tools for worship in this verse. One is their harp, and the other is incense.

**8 ... they were holding golden bowls full of incense,**

When God gave instructions for how the people were to worship Him in the Temple, incense was an important part. It was burned to produce a sweet smelling smoke that would rise up and serve as a symbol of worship rising to heaven and being pleasing to God. So it was important that it smell good. In fact, it was so important that God gave the exact recipe for how the incense was to be made.

**Exodus 30:34 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Take fragrant spices--gum resin, onycha and galbanum--and pure frankincense, all in equal amounts, 35 and make a fragrant blend of incense, the work of a perfumer. It is to be salted and pure and sacred. 36 ... It shall be most holy to you.**

They were to anoint everything in the Holy Place with that oil. And it smelled so good, God had to give instructions about people who wanted to use it in their homes.

**37 Do not make any incense with this formula for yourselves; consider it holy to the Lord. 38**

## **Whoever makes any like it to enjoy its fragrance must be cut off from his people."**

There was the death penalty for making this incense for personal use. The incense was something God took very seriously.

But did the smoke from that incense actually, physically rise all the way up to heaven? No. It filled the Holy Place with the fragrance, then dissipated into the atmosphere. It was symbolic. But what is in these golden bowls is not symbolic. What the twenty-four elders offer really does rise up to the throne of God. What is it? It is not literal, physical incense. It is something so holy, and so sacred, and so pleasing to God that it had to be kept in bowls made of gold, and it is compared to the holy incense of Old Testament times. What is it?

### **8 ... they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.**

Our prayers. Isn't that amazing? The elders offer our prayers to God as worship. They offer God what is pleasing to Him, and what is pleasing to Him is that which rises from the hearts of the saints.

If someone were to ask me, "Darrell, what would you like to be the distinctive sound of praise at Agape?" Some churches are known for having some amazing organ that is three stories high. Some are known for their really cool band that can play just like the most popular professional groups. For some the distinctive sound is piano, or guitar – what do we want to be the distinctive sound of worship at Agape? The answer is this – what we want as our distinctive sound is the voices of the saints.

Instruments are important, but they are important as accompaniment. They should not drown out our voices. Sometimes we crank up the volume of the band so that we can all shout praises to the Lord without feeling self-conscious about it, but for the most part, we want to keep the volume such that we can hear the voices of the saints – because it is the praises and prayers of the saints that are so pleasing to God, and so they should be pleasing to us.

But why *our* prayers? Why don't they offer their own prayers? Well, maybe they do. But it is our prayers – the prayers of the saints – that are so holy and so pleasing to God that they are in golden bowls and they are offered to God as incense.

Why is that? The text does not say, but based on all that is going on in the context of the book of Revelation, I think we can make an educated guess. Our prayers are especially pleasing to God because they are offered in faith. The elders trust God, but they do not have the same kind of faith we do, because they can see God. We cannot. Like Chris said at his baptism last week – **1 Peter 1:8** **Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him.** God is honored by faith. And the harder it is to believe Him, the more that belief honors Him. And since we cannot see Him, our faith in Him honors Him in a greater way than the faith of those who are in heaven. That is one reason why all our suffering and hardship and weakness and spiritual blindness are so important.

It enables us to glorify God in a greater way.

### ***Prayers of Faith Please God***

The next time you are tempted to think that praying is a waste of time – think about this. Even if none of your prayer ever get answered, and they did not do you any good at all, it would still be worth your while to pray just because your prayers are so pleasing to the Lord. So much so that the Elders offer our prayers to God as part of their worship.

This is one reason why it is so important that we do not get so carried away sharing prayer requests in our prayer groups that we spend the whole hour doing that and then only have a couple minutes at the end to actually pray. When we are in our prayer groups, we want to make sure we spend a significant amount of time actually praying for one another, here, together, on Sunday mornings, because the prayers of the saints are such a crucial part of corporate worship.

## ***Righteousness Makes the More Pleasing***

And one of the things that make our prayers so pleasing to God, is our righteousness.

**1 Peter 3:11 turn from evil and do good ... 12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.**

Our righteousness before God is emphasized in Revelation as especially pleasing to God. That is why ten times in Revelation the saints appear clothed in white. Our purity is an important ingredient for our corporate worship.

**Revelation 7:9 there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."**

**Revelation 19:6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear."**

"Is that talking about our positional righteousness in Christ, or our actual righteous deeds?"

**8 ...(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)**

Righteousness has always been essential to worship. That was the point of all the uncleanness codes in the Old Testament Law. And we see it in the Psalms as well.

**Psalms 24:3 Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? 4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart**

This is one reason why church discipline is so important. Jesus told us to put unrepentant sinners out of the church so that our worship would not be contaminated by the yeast of unrepentant sin. That is why in Matthew 5 Jesus told us that if we have a broken relationship, do not bother worshipping God until you have made an effort to reconcile. We must approach God with clean hands and a pure heart.

"So what should I do when I sin? Stay home from church?"

No.

**Revelation 7:14 I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.**

God has given us a way to deal with our sin. If we repent, God will cleanse us. He will wash our hands and purify our hearts and make us fit once again to approach His presence.

## ***Preparation for Worship***

When we sin we can still worship because we offer God our repentance as worship. However, it is important to understand that our repentance is like any other offering we present to God – it must be our first and best. It must be costly and whole-hearted. We can get so we respond to our sin by saying, "Oops, sorry God. I'm really, really, really sorry. I'm such an idiot. Please forgive me, amen" – and we're done with it.

And somehow that does not seem right, so then we go off in the opposite error. We think, "It just doesn't seem right that I should sin so horribly against God, and then offer a little two-minute prayer of repentance, then just waltz right back into His presence like nothing happened." And so we either back off of even trying to approach God in worship for a while, until our memory of that sin fades, or

we devise some form of self-punishment to show God how sorry we are.

Neither one of those is the right response to sin. It is never the right thing to back off on our effort to approach God, and punishing ourselves for our sin is an insult to the price Jesus paid on the cross. We do not need to add anything to the redemption price that was already paid. But neither is it appropriate for us to take our sin lightly, and offer God lame, sickly, half-baked repentance.

The solution is not cheap repentance or self-punishment. The solution is thorough repentance. And thorough repentance requires preparation. I have been reading a very helpful book called Gospel Worship, by Jeremiah Burroughs, who was a Puritan preacher in England 400 years ago. He has some things in that book about preparation for worship that I have found very eye-opening and convicting the last couple weeks.

One of the most obvious things we learn about worship from the Old Testament sacrificial system is the importance of preparation before approaching God. And I have been convicted the last couple weeks about how lightly I take the whole idea of approaching God.

### *Sinai*

In Exodus 19 God was going to come and speak to the people, so he told Moses to tell the people to get themselves ready.

**Exodus 19:10 And the Lord said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes 11 and be ready by the third day, because on that day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.**

God says, "I'm coming, and you have just three days to prepare." The people were to wash their clothes, and consecrate themselves. Why three days of preparation? And why all the requirements of preparation in the Old Covenant Law? All kinds of ritual washings, abstaining from various things, procedures and requirements that had to be fulfilled before coming to worship God. What was the point of all that? For example, what did the washing of the clothes accomplish? Is God really that offended by dirt on clothes? No - the issue was not the clothes; the issue was their hearts. Washing their clothes and doing all the other things to prepare themselves was designed to have an impact on their hearts.

Now, in our day we do not have all the rituals. However, has the need to prepare our hearts changed? Is it less important today than it was in Exodus 19 that our hearts be a right condition before attempting to draw near to Almighty God? Use your imagination, and put yourself in one of those tents for a moment. You have done everything you can to get yourself and your family ready, and today is the third day. You are awakened by a violent storm. The wind is whipping against your tent, and there is lightening and crashing thunder, and the kids are crying because the storm is so scary. But then, even over the crashes of thunder, you hear an even louder sound. It is a ram's horn – the loudest you have ever heard. You come out of the tent and ... there is no one blowing a ram's horn. The sound is coming from the mountain. And you look up at Sinai and you cannot see the summit because of a dark, dense cloud covering the mountain. But it is not just a cloud. There is also fire. The mountain engulfed in flame. And smoke billowing up like from a furnace. And if all that was not terrifying enough, now the ground starts to shake. But it is a strange earthquake. It does not seem to be coming from below, but from the mountain. And you look again at the mountain and it is just being rattled – like it cannot bear the weight of the presence of God and it is shaking violently which is affecting even the ground you are standing on. And just about the time you are about to pass out from fear, now it even gets more intense. It says that trumpet blast grew louder and louder. It was already overwhelming, and now the whole thing just grows and builds and intensifies.

Hebrews 12:18-21 says that mountain was burning with fire, and there was darkness, gloom and storm. And there was a trumpet blast and a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am



trembling with fear."

What was the point of all that? Do you think God wanted them to understand something about His greatness and holiness? When God told them that if anyone ever entered the Holy of holies they would die, or when Uzzah was instantly put to death by God when he touched the Ark of the Covenant, do you think God wanted the people to understand something of His greatness and holiness? We do not have a system like that anymore. We do not come to a mountain like Sinai. We come to the Church, where we have free access to God. But let me ask you this, now that this new system is in place, and the veil has been torn, is God less great and less holy than He was in Exodus 19? No, He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is just as holy, just as awesome, just as great today as He was then. So while we no longer have the rituals and ceremonies as required illustrations of how to prepare our hearts, it is still just as important today as it was then that we prepare our hearts for worship.

I have given a lot of thought this week to how to prepare for worship. When I look at passages like Exodus 19 it seems to me that the purpose of all the preparation, and the cosmic trumpet blast, and the storm and the fire and smoke and earthquake and all the rest – the purpose of all that was to bring the people's emotions into an appropriate condition for this event. If not the chief role, that is at least one of the main purposes of preparation for worship – to bring your affections into a condition appropriate for approaching God.

When I sin in an especially egregious way against an infinitely holy God, my repentance should probably take longer than two minutes. Before I go to God to ask for forgiveness and cleansing, I must first prepare myself so I can come with the right attitude and frame of mind. And I do that by doing whatever is needed to conform my emotions and affections to an appropriate condition. If I know what I did was sin, but I do not feel all that sorrowful, I am not really broken over it, it does not seem to me like it caused any real harm, or it seems like my failure was understandable given the circumstances, or for whatever reason I do not feel a sense of being crushed with sorrow over having offended a holy God and my beloved Father, I need to take some time to think about reality for however long it takes to bring my affections to the place of brokenness before God. And the purpose is not to punish myself. The purpose is to honor God, and to set Him apart as holy in my heart.

And that same principle applies to all godly affections. When we come before God after sinning we should have sorrow. When we come before God for praise, we should have joy. When we come before God in worship we should have strong desires for His presence. We should have delight in His attributes. We should have awe of His greatness. We should feel a sense of dependence on Him and great need. We should feel humbled before Him. We should be full of hope in Him. And all of that takes preparation. None of us just walk in here on Sunday naturally feeling all that.

That is why before Peter tells us to hope in God, he first tells us to prepare.

**1 Peter 1:13 Therefore, having prepared your minds for action; being sober; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.**

Before our hope can be what it should be, we must first prepare minds for action. Literally it says "Having girded up the loins of your mind..." – which is a reference to the practice of taking the corners of their robes and tucking them into their belt when they had to do some rigorous activity. It is like our phrase "rolling up your sleeves." Do whatever preparation it takes to generate hope in your heart.

So these last couple weeks I have really been focusing on this. Before I begin my morning prayer time, I take some time to prepare myself. I think through who I am about to talk to, and I examine my affections to see if they are fitting for approaching His presence, and when I see that they are not, I think through the truths from Scripture about what God is like and the truth about sin, and I keep doing that until I am in a frame of mind that would be fitting for drawing near the Almighty. Sometimes it takes fifteen or twenty minutes. But it has had a huge impact on my prayer times. And if that is appropriate for drawing near to God in personal prayer, how much more so for coming here for

corporate worship?

**Ecclesiastes 5:1,2 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. ... 2 Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.**

What would happen if we all got here fifteen minutes early to prepare ourselves? How much sweeter would be the incense of our prayers and praises to Him?

## Conclusion

Prepare your affections, then behold His glory, then respond with celebration and praise, and that praise will rise to God as a sweet-smelling incense.

**Benediction: Hebrews 13:20-21 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.**

## Application Questions:

- 1) In times when you are not prepared to approach God, which are you more prone to – approaching God with an unprepared heart, or skipping prayer altogether? Can you think of any specific things you could do to improve in that area?
- 2) Of the various godly affections that are fitting in worship, which one or two seem the most elusive to you?
  - Brokenness over sin
  - Joy in the Lord
  - Desire for His presence
  - Delight in His attributes
  - Awe of His greatness
  - A sense of dependence on Him and great need
  - Humility before Him
  - Hope in Him

What could be done to increase that godly affection in your life?

- 3) Do you think perhaps God may have given you the ability to play an instrument for the purposes of praise?