

Dabney Center
Spring 2003
Course: Liturgy
Teacher: Rich Lusk

Session #2

Thesis: In New Covenant worship, we draw near to God in heaven.

Text: Hebrews 10:19-31, with a focus on verses 19-22 (see also Hebrews 12:18-29; John 4:24; Revelation; etc.)

Background: The tabernacle/temple system

- Copies of heaven on earth (cf. Ex. 25:40; Heb. 8:5; see attached sheets)
- The tabernacle/temple system pointed upwards and forwards
- Israel was so near to God . . .
- . . . and yet so far away

Exegetical highlights:

1. The basis of our access: Why may we draw near?

- “Draw near” is a technical term for sacrificial worship (cf. 10:1); the animals were “brought near” God’s presence as representatives
- Old Covenant saints barred from God’s presence in the Most Holy Place (Gen. 3; tabernacle and temple veils)
- Jesus has torn the veil in his death and ascension (Mk. 15; Rev. 4-5)
- His High Priestly ministry is our ticket into the heavenly sanctuary (his blood shed plus constant intercession); unlike Old Covenant High Priests, he enters the Most Holy Place to sit and to stay, and takes his people in with him

2. Prerequisites/Qualifications: Who may draw near?

- “a true heart in full assurance” = trusting in Christ and his finished work; not just going through the motions, but throwing our entire persons into the liturgy
- “having our hearts sprinkled” = cleansed and forgiven; sprinkling with blood was part of the Levitical priestly ordination rite (along with washing with water; cf. Lev. 8)
- “bodies washed with pure water” = baptism; New Covenant baptism fulfills all the priestly washings of the Old Covenant system; in particular, baptism fulfills Old Covenant priestly ordination; in the New Covenant, we are all members of the same royal priesthood; the Old Covenant system of graded holiness (with its spatial implications for “drawing near”) has been washed away in baptism
- Once-and-for-all washing at baptism; repeated cleansings through confession and absolution

3. The place/environment: Where are we when we draw near?

- The earthly tabernacle/temple was a model of the heavenly sanctuary
- Heavenly access has now been granted – we enter heaven itself (mysteriously) in worship; cf. “mountain” and “upper room” worship events in Ex., Jn. 13-17, Acts 20, Heb. 12, etc., as well Rev. (John is taken up into heaven “in the Spirit” on “the Lord’s Day”); ascension offering; glory cloud
- This is the traditional view: Liturgy of St. James, Germanus, Calvin, Puritans, Leithart, etc.
- The Preface and *Sursum Corda*: heaven is opened; we worship with angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven; note that under the Old Covenant, angels kept the people out (Eden, temple veils); the Old Covenant saints were transferred to heaven 30-70 A. D. (Heb. 11:40)
- Implications:

Liturgy and culture: understanding that the true liturgical environment is heaven helps us answer questions about what is appropriate in liturgy (e.g., joy and solemnity – heaven is a happy place, but also the Father’s throne room – act accordingly; liturgy and intelligibility to a casual non-Christian visitor -- if liturgy is a journey into heaven, unbelievers don’t make the trip – as Schmemmann says, “we never get anywhere because we never leave any place behind”; liturgy and culture relationship – inheriting and developing the church’s liturgical culture – is earthly culture the pattern for heavenly worship or vice versa?; etc.)

Liturgy and history: understanding that in worship we enter the Throne Room of the King of the universe helps us grasp the power and efficacy of liturgy, especially liturgical prayer (worship as warfare – holy war!); we change the world by what we do in heaven; we are God’s counselors (Abraham, Moses, Amos, Heb. 4, Rev. 8, etc.)

4. Abandoning worship: Why must we not forsake this special gathering?

- The gathering encourages and equips us; “consider one another” (10:24; cf. 3:1) implies thoughtful, loving concern towards other members of the body – treat them as you would Jesus (because they are Jesus to you!); worship builds community, it weaves our lives together into one
- You cannot grow as a Christian apart from this gathering; without it, you will wither and die
- Special reference to 70 A.D. (“the Day approaching”); application to us
- To abandon public worship is apostasy (1 Jn. 2:19; Calvin: “it is always disastrous to leave the church”)
- If you do not draw near to God in heaven weekly, how can you expect to go there when you die? GO TO CHURCH OR GO TO HELL!