

WORSHIP

The Christian's Highest Occupation

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

IX. THE PLACE OF WORSHIP

A confused idea exists in Christendom as to the place of worship. Certain buildings, of an ecclesiastical design, are often called “places of worship.” These are duly and formally “consecrated,” and often such a building is referred to as “**the house of God.**” This, of course, is entirely foreign to the New Testament, which is the believer's sole authority in the matter of worship, or any other matter on which it speaks. The woman of Samaria was puzzled regarding the matter of the correct geographical location for worship. She said to Christ: “**Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; [Mt. Gerizim] and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship**” (John 4:20).

Our Lord's reply to her makes perfectly clear that the geographical situation, or the kind of building, is utterly immaterial to worship. Mark His words well: “**Believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father . . . But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him**” (vss. 21-23).

In these words our Lord completely swept away the common idea that one locality, or one building, is more sacrosanct than another; or that worship is more acceptable to Him when offered in one place than another. The place, or the building, has nothing whatever to do with worship. It is the spiritual condition of the worshipper, and not his physical location that determines whether or not his worship is acceptable to the Father.

Once this fundamental fact is really grasped by the believer, it will deliver him from a great deal of the misconception regarding this matter that abounds in Christendom. Let us consider this subject of the place of worship under two aspects, the spiritual and the physical.

1. Spiritually, Worship Is In the Holiest of All

The Christian worships, spiritually, where his great High Priest is. This is Heaven, or the holiest of all. This fact is set forth for us in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In it the writer uses the illustration of the Tabernacle as the “**pattern of things in the heavens**” (Hebrews 9:23). He proceeds to describe how Aaron, the high priest of Israel, entered once a year into the holiest of all, with the blood of the sin offering which he had offered for his own sins, and also for the sins of the people of Israel (Hebrews 9:1-10).

He then proceeds to contrast Aaron's high priestly work with that of Christ, the great High Priest.

He says: **“But Christ, being come an high Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in once (for all) into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us”** (Hebrews 9:11-12).

As the holiest of all, in the tabernacle, was a type of Heaven and the presence of God; so Christ, by virtue of His substitutionary sacrifice, and the eternal value of His precious blood, has entered into Heaven as the great High Priest of His redeemed people.

The writer then goes on to say: **“For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures [or types] of the true, but into Heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us”** (Hebrews 9:23).

Not only has Christ entered into Heaven as our Divine Representative, but He has opened up, for all His people, **“a new and living way,”** by which they are enabled, spiritually, to enter the holiest also and pour out their worship in the presence of God.

It will be recalled that the veil of the temple, which shut men out from the presence of God, was rent in twain at the death of Christ. By this God signified that the perfect sacrifice of His Son had met all His holy claims, and that access into His presence and favor could now be the portion of all who trusted in Christ and His finished work. The Word is quite clear as to this fact, for we read: **“Having therefore brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he has consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say his flesh; and having an high Priest over the house of God, let us draw near, with a true heart, in full assurance of faith,”** etc. (Hebrews 10:19-22).

Thus every born-again believer, being constituted a priest unto God, is both spiritually fitted and Divinely invited to come by faith into the very holiest of all and worship. What is true of an individual is also true of an assembly of believers. As they meet in the name of the Lord Jesus, they form a God-constituted company of priests. As such, through their great High Priest, they may lay hold, by faith, upon God's provision and spiritually enter within the holiest of all, to present their worship to the Father and the Son. Christian hymn writers have beautifully expressed this truth in song, and believers delight to join in the following hymn by J.G. Deck:

“The veil is rent, lo, Jesus stands
Before the throne of grace;
And clouds of incense from His hands
Fill all that glorious place.

His precious blood is sprinkled there,
Before and on the throne;
And His own wounds in Heaven declare
The work that saves is done.

Within the holiest of all,
Cleansed by His precious blood,
Before the throne we prostrate fall,
And worship Thee, our God.”

While believers are physically on earth yet, in the energy of faith, they enter spiritually into the reality of this blessed truth. Thus their spirits are bathed in celestial atmosphere, so that they can sing in verity and truth:

“Shut in with Thee, far, far above
The restless world that wars below;
We seek to learn and prove Thy love,
Thy wisdom and Thy grace to know.”

A saintly believer, who lived in the enjoyment of this truth, was once asked: “How far is Heaven from earth?” He replied: “It cannot be far, for I spent half an hour there this morning!”

There is only a veil between Heaven and earth.

The child of God may enter within that veil by faith, and prostrate himself before the throne of grace in worship. With his fellow-believers he can truthfully sing:

“Through Thy precious body broken, inside the veil;
O what words to sinners spoken, inside the veil;
Precious as the blood that bought us,
Perfect as the love that sought us,
Holy as the Lamb that brought us, inside the veil.

Lamb of God, through Thee we enter, inside the veil;
Cleansed by Thee, we boldly venture, inside the veil;
Not a stain, a new creation,
Ours is such a full salvation;
Low we bow in adoration, inside the veil!”

Thus, by faith, guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, and through the great High Priest of their confession, believers are enabled, spiritually, to enter the holiest of all, and worship God in the beauty of holiness.

2. Physically, Worship May be Anywhere, or in Any Building

There are no geographical limits to worship. One can worship just as truly at the North Pole as at the South Pole nor is any building required for this purpose, though such may be a great convenience to a company of believers, particularly in bad weather. The size, cost and architectural design of such a building has nothing whatever to do with the worth, or otherwise, of worship.

Our Lord's words should dispel any false ideas as to the value of one building, or place, as against another: "**Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them**" (Matthew 18:20).

It is the presence of Christ, in the midst of His people, that sanctifies the gathering, and not the kind of building that encloses them.

The huge ornate and costly buildings that men have erected add not a whit to the value, or acceptability of the worship offered therein. In fact, many of these buildings merely represent a great waste of time, labor and money. In the early days of the history of the Church, believers frequently met for worship in the home of a fellow believer; so that we often read of "the church, which is in his house" (Colossians 4:15; Romans 16:5, etc.). This does not imply, of course, that any old ramshackle building should be erected and used as a meeting place for believers. Such a building should at least meet the requirements of common decency, and be a suitable place to which others may be brought to hear the Gospel.

Thus the physical location of the worshipping believer, or believers, is utterly immaterial.

Nor is there any virtue in the physical posture he adopts: whether he kneels, sits, or stands. The believer can worship as he lies upon his bed, as he walks to work, as he rides in the street car, train, bus, or auto, as he works, or as he kneels in his bedroom, etc.

It is the spiritual quality of the worship of the individual believer, or of a company of believers, that determines its worth to God. Nor is the time of day material to worship. Any time of the day or night is equally fitting. It can be offered in the flush of early morning, in the brightness of the noon, in the soft velvet of the evening, or in the blackness of midnight. All times are equally appropriate for this highest of all occupations.

It is not the physical place where, or the time when; but the spiritual how, that is the important factor in worship.

Though physically on earth, the Christian, with Divine fitness and holy boldness, worships in Heaven.

May it be ours to experience much of its reality in our own lives!

~ end of chapter 22 ~

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