

## COMING TO CHURCH

**“But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” (Heb 12:22-24)**

The contrast is clear. Jewish worshipers came to a mountain that could be touched (Heb.12:18). Christian worshipers come to a mountain that cannot be touched. Understanding this contrast is key to understanding Christianity. The Jews could “touch” Mt. Sinai, the tabernacle of Moses, and the temple of Solomon. They could not, however, “touch” God or the heavenly Jerusalem. When Christians come to church we come in contact with a whole panoply of spiritual realities that cannot be seen with human eyes, or touched by human hands. As our text indicates, these realities include God, Christ, thousands of angels, and the spirits of righteous men made perfect. The only way that Christians make contact with this unseen world, of course, is by faith. It is faith that enables us to be certain about things we cannot see (Heb. 11:1). Remember! We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1).

So the Hebrews were admonished to come to church as they saw the “day” approaching (Heb. 10:25). That “day” may well have been the destruction of the Jewish Temple. Their reason for “coming to church” was the presence of spiritual reality. Jesus somehow manifests Himself in a new dimension where two or three are gathered together in His name (Matt. 18:20).

Many modern believers are drawn to church by eloquent preaching and trendy music. Such was not the case during the age of the apostles. Thomas Lindsay in his book “The Church in the Early Centuries” offers this stunning insight: *“The unity of the Christian Church . . . is not confined within the bounds of space and time as merely material entities are. It can be present in many places at the same time, and in such a way that, as Ignatius says, ‘where Jesus Christ is, there is the whole church’ . . . The Christians of the early centuries clung to this thought, and we have a long series of writers from Victor of Rome in the second century, down to Clement of Alexandria and Origen, who tell us that the whole Church of the redeemed, with Christ and the angels is present in the public worship of the individual congregation . . . ”* (pages 14, 15).

So Christians do not come to a mountain that can be touched. We “come to church” instead to experience spiritual reality. Our focus is on things above (Col. 3:2). We fix our eyes on what is unseen (2 Cor. 4:18). We walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). It is not necessary to have stained glass windows and organ music. The reality of God can be experienced in caves and catacombs without the benefit of slick packaging and carefully choreographed presentations.

Jewish worship, so ornate and expensive, was about to come to a dramatic conclusion. The Law of Moses strictly forbade worship outside of Jerusalem (Deut. 12:4 - 14). This is why Jews came to Jerusalem out of every nation under heaven (Acts 2:5). The destruction of the Temple signaled the official end of Jewish worship. Many think this was the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet (Matt. 24:15). The Hebrew Christians received this admonition to “come” to church just a few brief years before the temple was so completely destroyed that not one stone was left upon another (Matt. 24:2). We are fortunate indeed that the gates of hell cannot prevail over the church of the Living God (Matt. 16:18).

It is a sad that many today have so lost their focus on spiritual reality that when the electricity goes off their worship is over. Remember the Philistines. They too were famous for their technology and for a long period of time even held a monopoly on iron smithing. It is important to remember that a thousand Philistine soldiers who depended upon technology were killed with the jawbone of an ass. So also the Gospel seems to have more power in those primitive parts of the world that have no modern technology and thus are forced to depend upon God.

So, each one of us needs to seriously consider what kind of a church we are coming to.