

WE HAVE COME INTO HIS HOUSE

Part 1

(Song prior: #296, *We Have Come Into His House*)

We have come into His house to worship Him. I love that song because it reminds me of the real purpose for our being here this morning. It is possible that some might be confused by the expression, "His house." I want you to know that isn't talking about this building, per se. This structure that sits at 1905 Joes Street is not God's house. The Old Testament notion of a place, or edifice such as the tabernacle or temple is where God is found and worshipped just doesn't fit who we are and what we are doing today as Christians. His house is His people, says 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17. According to 1 Peter 2:4-5, Christians are the spiritual, living stones with which God's house is being built.

So, when we say, "We have come into His house," let us understand that what we are really talking about is our assembling together. It is those stones coming together in Christ's name. We are God's house and we have come into His house to worship Him.

This morning, I want us to do some serious thinking about that word "worship." That's what we are here for, isn't it? At least that's what we say we are here to do. We have come to worship God. There may other reasons why we come, and that is fine as long as we don't forget or neglect our primary purpose.

But what is worship? What are we actually doing? Who is it for? Is it for God, the one being worshipped, or is it for us, the ones doing the worship? Does God have a need us to worship Him, or do we have a need to worship God? Think about that.

Just how, exactly is God worshipped? Is God worshipped by what we do, as for example, by our singing, or bowing our heads and praying? Is that worship? Or, is God worshipped by our feelings and attitudes and thoughts as we do things like singing and praying? And how about this business of the Lord's Supper? When we partake of that bread and cup, is that worship? How about when the collection plate is passed, when we place something in that plate, are we worshipping God?

Think about these things brethren because as we just sang a few minutes ago, "We have come into His house to worship Him." I want us to think about what it means to worship God, and how we do that.

There's a passage of scripture found in the book of Genesis that arouses my curiosity. In **Genesis 4:26**, we read, "*To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD.*" I think Moses, by the power of the Holy Spirit, was telling us something important there. What did he mean, people "*began to call upon the name of the LORD?*" Did he mean they began praying at that time; they began calling

out to God at that time? Did he mean that people began worshipping God at that time? Just what did he mean?

Some commentators (JFB) suggest that the passage could be translated, *“at that time people began to be called by the name of the Lord.”* That is, if you read the intervening verses between the story of Cain and Abel and the birth of Seth and Seth’s son, you read how the lineage of Cain developed into people spreading far and wide, taking many wives, building cities, forging instruments of iron and bronze, musical instruments, killing people and boasting about it. So, verses 25 and 26 might be contrasting the godlier seed of Adam, that of his son Seth who are called by the name of the Lord. Thus you have the beginning of the so-called secularists—those who live as if there is no God, and those who live in the fear of God. Maybe that is the meaning.

Another commentary (Gill) suggests that these words in verse 26 refer to worship becoming more communal. That is, over time worship evolved from something done privately and individually. People began coming together to worship God. Yet another commentary (K&D) says, *“We have here an account of the commencement of that worship of God which consists in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, or in the acknowledgment and celebration of the mercy and help of Jehovah.”* That is, the idea of men beginning to call on the Lord is that the idea of beseeching the Lord because of some great need, or because of some great sin became more and more the practice of god-fearing people.

I kind of lean towards that view because we know worship had been going on prior to that. At the beginning of that chapter, we read about the births of Cain and Abel, two sons born to Adam and Eve. We then read about some offerings made by each of these young men, which I will have more to say about in a few minutes. We are not told why they were doing this but it seems a reasonable inference based on what is said about Abel’s offering in Hebrews 11:4 that God had told them to do this.

What we do know is that the idea or practice of worship goes back almost to the beginning of human history. Now, thousands and thousands of years after the world began, here we are again. We are sitting here singing, “We have come into His house to worship Him.” Well, are we doing that? How do we know? What does it mean to worship God anyway?

I want to spend some time for the next few weeks looking at some passages in both the Old and New Testaments where the word or idea of worship is found. I want us to see if we can learn something about worship that will help us to think more clearly and Biblically about what we say we are here to do.

Actually, the first time this word “worship” is used in the Scriptures is in **Genesis 22:5**. This is the passage where the Lord commanded Abraham to take his son Isaac and offer him as a burnt offering to God. **Verse 5** says, *“Then Abraham said his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.’”* The word worship there is Hebrew word that is used most of the time to express this idea of worship. It is the word

Sha-chah which means “to bow down, to bow low, to prostrate oneself.” This gives us some idea of what Abraham must have had in mind. He and Isaac would go, and when Isaac was offered upon the altar, then Abraham would prostrate himself before God in an effort and hope that his obedient act would be acceptable to God.

That was the first time the word worship was used, but as we have already seen, the idea of worshipping God goes back a long time before that. I mentioned the offerings of Cain and Abel. It will be good for us to take a look at that passage a little closer. Let’s read together **Genesis 4, verses 1-5:**

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." 2) And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. 3) In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4) and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, 5) but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

Now certainly, we would tend to think of what these two men did as worship; they were making an offering to the Lord. Cain offered some of the things which he had grown; Abel offered something from his flock. But isn’t it interesting, the text says that *“the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.”*

We could easily spend the rest of our time this morning exploring the possible reasons why Abel’s worship was accepted and Cain’s was not, but I simply want to draw your attention to what I believe is a very disturbing thought-- this passage shows us that just because we come into His house to worship Him does not mean at all that God accepts our worship.

Think about that. Think about that really hard because imagine that come judgment day you learn that everything you did for all those years and all those times, that you called “worshipping God,” turned out to be in vain; that God was not honored or pleased in the least by any of that!

Between Genesis 4 and Genesis 22 there are a number of occasions where we see what we would call worship taking place. In **5:22** we read that *“Enoch walked with God.”* That is not only an indication that he was a man who feared God, but who also expressed that reverence in worship. The same thing is said of Noah in **6:9**. In **8:20**, after emerging from the ark one year and ten days after they had entered it, the Bible says, *“Noah built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.”*

In **chapter 12** we read of Abraham being called by the Lord to leave his home and his family and to go to a land that God would show him, and eventually give to him and his descendants. **Verse 7** says, *“Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this*

land.' So he build there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him." **The next verse** says, *"From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the Lord."*

In **chapter 13, verses 3 & 4**, after returning from a stint in Egypt, Abraham returned to that place between Bethel and Ai, *"and there Abram called upon the name of the Lord."* We are not told just what this "calling on the name of the Lord" involved but since it was at the place where he had built an altar earlier, it is safe to assume that some kind of offering was made.

Verse 18 of that same 13th chapter tells us that Abraham moved to the area around Hebron, settling by the Oaks of Mamre, *"and there he built an altar to the Lord."* You can be certain that if he built an altar, His plan was to use that altar in worshipping God.

In the 15th chapter, you have that interesting account of God making a covenant with Abraham, in which Abraham was told to bring God a heifer, three years old, a female goat, three years old, a ram three years old and a turtledove and a young pigeon. Each of these was cut in half, except for the birds and the pieces laid one upon the other. On into the night Abraham waited nearby the slain carcasses, keeping scavenger birds away.

Chapter 17 records the interesting account of God commanding Abraham and his sons and all of the men of his house to be circumcised. **Verse 23** says, *"Then Abraham took Ishmael his son and all those born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him."*

In **20:7, 17** we read where the word pray or prayer is used for the first time in the Bible. Abraham prayed to God on behalf of Abimelech, the king of Gerar.

In **21:33**, we read where Abraham planted a Tamarisk tree in Beersheba, *"and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God."*

Now, in all of these references, and we have just touched the hem of the garment insofar as Old Testament references are concerned, what do we see? What do we learn? Having come here this morning, have we done what Abel did when he offered the fat of the firstborn from his flock? Have we done what Enoch was doing, or what Noah did that found so much favor in the eyes of God? Are we doing what Abraham did when he built that altar between Bethel and Ai, and again near Beersheba? Are we doing what he did when he took his son upon the mountain that day, as he told his servants, to "go yonder and worship?"

What does it mean to worship God? How do we do that and how do we do that in such a way that it is pleasing to God, that it is acceptable to Him, and that he is pleased with us? That is what we will be exploring and thinking about for the next few weeks.

Someone has said, that “the heart of the worshipper is the heart of worship.” Well, that sounds good, but what does it mean, and is that what the Bible teaches? Obviously we know that the heart must be involved in what we are doing. In **Matthew 15:8, 9**, we have that familiar passage where Jesus was dressing down the hypocrisy of many of the Jews. He said, *“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; 9) in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”* Now there are several issues that bear investigation there but that idea, “they honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me,” is the one that I want us to dwell on for a few moments.

Obviously, it must be possible for people to say, or sing, or pray, or even read the right words; good words, true words, but still miss worshipping God by a country mile. That is because if the heart of the worshipper is not present, then the words fail to come up before God in any kind of pleasing way.

But not only must the heart be involved in worship, it must be right with God. I suspect that’s what really happened to Cain, the reason why his offering was not accepted. I know many people believe and teach that the reason why Abel’s offering was accepted by the Lord is because he offered a blood sacrifice. They argue on the basis of Hebrews 11:4 that the Bible says it was “by faith” that he offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, and since *“faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God”*—Romans 10:17, then it logically follows that Abel did what God told him to do—i.e. offer an animal sacrifice, and Cain didn’t.

But that isn’t the take the apostle John puts on the matter in **1 John 3:12**. John writes, *“We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds (plural) were evil and his brother’s righteous.”* Apparently Cain had some other stuff going on in his life that was evil but he didn’t think that was anything to worry about because he would make an offering to God and everything would be okay. So for us to truly be able to offer God acceptable worship, our hearts have to be involved and they have to be right with God. When those things are true, then truly, “the heart of the worshipper becomes the heart of worship.”

Over in **Revelation 3:14-22** we have recorded one of the letters sent to one of the seven churches of Asia. This one was addressed to the church in Laodicea. There was something very wrong with the church in that city. It wasn’t (or isn’t) all that unusual, but it was something very wrong. The Christians of that city were self-righteous, self-sufficient, and self-satisfied. They didn’t see themselves as they really were. In **verse 17** the Lord tells them they are *“wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.”*

Even so, the Lord desperately wanted them to enjoy his blessings. He wanted them to sit with Him on His throne. And so in **verse 20** we read, *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him, and he with me.”*

There is a famous painting based on this passage. I am sure most of you have seen it and know it well. Jesus is standing at a door knocking, but there is something unusual about that door. There is no door knob. The artist meant for people to see and understand that if we want to have Christ in our hearts, we are the ones who must open the door. God doesn't force us to love him, to seek him, to worship Him, or to serve Him. He longs for us to do, but He will not force His desires on us.

And so, if it is really true that "we have come into His house to worship Him," then let us make sure that we do so with a heart that is right with God and with a heart that totally in love with Him.

And when we do that, do you know, we are not going to be thinking or saying, "I just really didn't get much out of worship today!" When anyone says that, they are just admitting they showed up with a heart that was neither open nor right with God.

We are going to sing a song now, we call it an invitation song. What we mean by that is that as we sing this song together—as an act of worship to God, if you know your heart is not right with God; if there is anything blocking you from worshipping God the way He wants to be worshipped, this would be an excellent time to get that right.

So as we sing together, if you need to come, please don't wait. Come while we stand and sing.