

Discussion Guide: What Have We Come To?

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:42 (NIV)

January 26, 2003: "What Have We Come To?" by Dr. James Grier, Emeritus Professor, Grand Rapids Baptist Seminary in Michigan. Reading from Hebrews 12:18-29, Dr. Grier contrasted how the people of God viewed worship under the old covenant and Mount Sinai, and how we today should view worship under the new covenant in Mount Zion. He challenged us to realize that when we come to worship our God we are part of something much greater than what we see and experience in our physical surroundings.

When the people of God, under the old covenant, came into the presence of God at Mount Sinai they were terrified.

You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such 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."
Hebrews 12:18-21 (NIV)

Today when we, as the people of God under the new covenant, come before him in worship, we are joint participants in worshiping our God in Mount Zion. And we are encouraged by the preacher in Hebrews to worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, and from a thankful heart for his grace in bringing us into his kingdom and welcoming us into his presence.

What have we come to?

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. Hebrews 12:22-24 (NIV)

Dr. Grier pointed out that, under the new covenant, we as Christians are fellow citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, and when we come before God in our corporate worship we are joining a joyful assembly of a multitude of others who are worshiping in the city of the living God.

Although we cannot see them, we are joining...

- thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, and
- all those whose names are written in heaven (fellow Christians),

who have come to...

- God [the Father], the judge of all men,
- The spirits of the righteous, who have departed before us and are now with the Lord, and to
- Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant whose shed blood speaks volumes about the undeserved grace of God.

The preacher, according to Dr. Grier, brings the two contrasts between the old and the new covenants to their ultimate conclusion with a warning and words of encouragement.

The warning: Do not disregard the voice of God and let the "things of this world" be the center of your life...for they have no lasting value. For the "things of this world" will be consumed by the fire of his wrath. Like a forest fire that gets out of control, the fire of God's wrath will consume everything in its path that is not built upon the solid unshakeable foundation that he has laid.

The encouragement: Obey the voice of God and center your life instead on the "unshakeable things" of his kingdom...for they are the things that have lasting value. Build your life in Christ with a thankful heart and worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.

See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken--that is, created things--so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire." Hebrews 12:25-29 (NIV)

Discussion Questions:

1. As we are invited to be participants in the Dance of Eternity (see sermon notes for January 19, 2003), based on today's sermon text with whom are we joint participants when we come together in our time of worship?
2. What effect does this perspective have on your time of worship?
3. Should our worship extend beyond our time together on Sunday? If so, what should it look like?¹
4. What are the "things of this world" that lead so many astray?²
5. What are the "unshakeable things" of God's kingdom that should be at the center of our lives?

¹ John 4:19-24 and Romans 9:1-5 in contrast with Romans 12:1-2

² Luke 4:5-8

Food for Thought

Worship is both an attitude in which a person lives and a spiritual exercise that he carries out (Exodus 33:10; Romans 12:1). It is an activity not only of the spirit, but also of the mind (1 Corinthians 14:15) . It is something that is done individually and collectively (Genesis 22:5; 24:52; 1 Chronicles 29:20; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 14:26).³

Living in the world. Chief among the characteristics of the ordinary (unbelieving) people of the world are covetousness and pride. Their lives are governed according to what they want to get or want to do, without any regard for God (1 John 2:16).⁴

³ Page 466, Student Edition of the *World's Bible Dictionary* by Don Fleming, published by World Publishing in Grand Rapids, MI (1990).

⁴ Page 465, Student Edition of the *World's Bible Dictionary*.