

Come, Let Us Adore Him

1. *Gathering In His Presence*

December 2-3, 2017

Please turn in your Bible to Exodus 32.

What did you expect when you came in to worship today? Maybe you expected to hear a band play some great music. Maybe you expected to meet and talk with someone you know. Maybe you expected that a teacher would stand up and give a 30-minute talk. (If not, SURPRISE!)

Here's what I hope: from now on, when you come to worship, I hope you will expect to *meet God*. Because that is what worship is. **In worship, we meet God**. Worship is not a Christian concert, a social event or even a Bible lesson. And worship is not an obligation to fulfill in order to keep God happy with us.

Worship professor Robert Webber defines worship as "a meeting between God and his people." Simply put, worship is an encounter with God. When we look at the examples of worship in the Bible, they involve people meeting God. It doesn't matter whether we worship using formal liturgy with robes and choirs, or with a band and screens. It is all about meeting God. So, every week here at Crossroads, we try to design a service that will help you connect with God -- to recognize his presence. That is the point of worship.

Sadly, not everyone *does* experience God when they gather with others in worship. George Barna surveyed thousands of church-going American Christians. He asked, "Have you ever experienced God in a worship service?" One third of the people said they have never experienced God's presence in worship. And the other two-thirds said that it is rare.

Now, Barna didn't define what he meant by experiencing God's presence - he just let people answer the question the way they wanted. But the fact that most people don't believe they've connected with God in worship is a problem, because worship is a connection with God.

In fact, maybe the reason many people don't go to worship on a weekend is that they have already been there and they didn't meet God. Going to church without experiencing God is like going to a football game without seeing any players; you might find something else to do but it is pretty boring.

Why is it we might not experience God in worship? There are many possible reasons. The book of Exodus says a lot about worship, and it brings up a couple of questions to ask ourselves if we are not experiencing God in worship. If I am not meeting God in worship, first ask: **Do I truly want to?** Not everyone does.

After 400 years, the Jewish people finally escaped from slavery in Egypt. They saw God part the Red Sea and then drown the Egyptian army behind them. Then they watched Moses go up to Mt. Sinai where he met with God and received the 10 Commandments. While Moses was on the mountain with God, the people stayed down below and heard thunder, lightning and the sound of trumpets on the mountain. It freaked them out. When Moses came back down off the mountain, they told him, "If that is what God is like, we don't want to get near him! You meet with God so we don't have to! You just tell us what he said." They decided they didn't want to meet a God who was thunder and lightning and power. **Exodus 20:21** *The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.*

If we are not experiencing God in worship, the first questions to ask are, "Do I truly want to? Am I afraid of what might happen if I get too close to him? Am I nervous about what he might ask me to do?"

Friends, you don't have to shield yourself from God's presence. He loves you. He won't hurt you. **Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24** describes what it is like for us to draw near to God in worship: *You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; ¹⁹ 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,*

No, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to countless thousands of angels in a joyful gathering. ²³ You have come to the assembly of God's firstborn children, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God himself, who is the judge over all things. You have come to the spirits of the righteous ones in heaven who have now been made perfect. ²⁴ You have come to Jesus...

God is the creator of the universe, but he is also your heavenly Father. When you experience the living God, it is more fulfilling than anything on earth! Nothing else compares!

Secondly, ask: **Am I worshipping something else?** The human heart has room for only one God. If something other than the living God takes first place in our hearts, then we won't meet him well in worship.

Exodus 32: 1 says that when Moses was on the mountain meeting with God, the people who stayed down below got restless waiting for him. After a while, they felt they needed reassurance that a god was with them, so they melted down their gold jewelry and Aaron made a statue of a calf: *[Aaron] took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."* Then they held a wild or orgy as they worshiped the calf.

Get this picture: Moses was on Mt. Sinai meeting with the living God, and down below the people were dancing around a statue of a golden calf. The people were not meeting with God because they were busy with their idol.

Today we don't make golden statues to worship. We make different kinds of idols. An idol is anything that we put in the place of God, and it will keep us from an encounter in worship. For example, we may not meet with God because we've given our passion to sports team instead. We do what it takes to follow them, or our kids learn playing sports is more important than pursuing Jesus. Or we give loyalty and allegiance to a political party/persuasion, so we form opinions based on them instead of what God says. Or we dedicate lives to work or to a relationship or to our kids. There is nothing wrong with any of these things, except if they become more important to us than God. We can't worship more than one God.

Worship is a response to God's presence. Moses had an on-going habit of meeting with God. When he did he became aware of God's presence. **Exodus 33:7-11** *Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the "tent of meeting." Anyone inquiring of the LORD would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. ⁸ And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. ⁹ As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the LORD spoke with Moses.* The "pillar of cloud" represented the Presence of God. Moses and the people knew that God was present in a special way when Moses went to the tent.

¹⁰ *Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to their tent.*

¹¹ *The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.* The people sensed the presence of God and it caused them to worship. In fact, Joshua did not leave the tent! He wanted more of God's presence. He tasted it and wanted more.

We are created to be in God's presence. When we realize that God is present, we will want more of him. We realize we are on holy ground. God's presence brings peace and joy to the heart, or sometimes overwhelming love. Sometimes we are silenced in awe.

When couples are in love, they just want to be with each other. I knew a guy who drove 7 hours one way just to spend a couple hours with his girlfriend, then turned around and drove back again. He just wanted to be in her presence.

It is so precious to be in God's presence that Moses couldn't do without it.

Exodus 33:14-15 *The LORD replied, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” Then Moses said to him, “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.* Moses said, if your presence isn't coming with us, I'm not taking another step. He couldn't go on leading the people toward the Promised Land if he couldn't have God's presence with him.

Most of the time, I feel very blessed in so many ways. But there have been seasons in my life when the pressure and stress became nearly intolerable, and I didn't know what would happen. During those times, what I longed for the most was to hear a word from God. Because I did, it meant he was present with me, and that is all I need.

Whether we know it or not, we need God's presence. And the good news is that **God promises to be present when we gather together.** Jesus told us: **Matthew 18:20** - *For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.* To gather in Jesus name means to get together with the purpose of connecting with Jesus.

Now, Jesus is always with us, but when we gather with him in his name, he is there is a special way. When we gather, we can experience what is called the “Revealed presence of God”. That is when he opens our eyes and spirits to his presence. Seeking God's presence leads us to gather with His people. Many more experience the risen Jesus with others instead of alone

Gathering is not always easy. I remember when our three boys were young, getting to church with them felt like mobilizing the Marines. So, to you parents that are here today, I offer great respect. It can be a feat to get the kids dressed, fed and into the car. You get here just on time, then you have to check the kids into KidZone. During the service, your mind can drift to what you're doing that afternoon. After the service it's time to pick up kids and get out the door. That's a lot of work. Is it worth it?

Some say, “I don't have to go to weekend worship to be Christian.” That is true. And you don't have to be in water to be a fish, but it won't be a healthy fish if it stays out of the water for long. Coming to worship with other believers is like a whale coming up to breathe. We spend all week immersed in a world which runs counter to God's ways, then on a Sunday (or Saturday) we come up to breathe the air of heaven at worship.

“I don't have to go to church to believe in God.” Believing in God is not the point. The point is to become like Christ (who made it a habit to gather each week at the synagogue.)

I don't know anyone who is living a sold-out life (becoming more and more like Jesus) who doesn't gather with other followers in some way. I'm not saying we can't believe in God, I'm saying that healthy, vibrant growing faith is found in

those who worship together. That is why **Hebrews 10:25** tells us, *not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Bob Kauflin writes that when we gather we experience greater awareness of God's presence; we receive the Sacraments like Communion and baptism; we hear teaching together, which is more powerful than when alone; we get the chance to serve and care for others; and we experience unity and God's family.

Heaven will not be a solitary experience. It will be all of God's people gathered in God's presence. **Revelation 21:3** *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.*

To experience God's presence in worship, **first, arrive expecting to meet God**. Come anticipating you will meet God. We usually get what we expect in worship. Sure, God can surprise us at times; but generally, if we come to worship planning just to go through the motions, we probably won't meet God. If we come expecting and assuming that we will meet God, we will. Remember Jesus promised to be present when we gather, so plan on it.

Second, be alert for God's presence. When you drive into the parking lot, have your spiritual radar up and scanning for God's presence. It can happen at different times each week. One week you might sense God's presence during a song we're singing together. Another week you might sense God's prompting during the message that "this is for you." Another time, it might be during the prayer, or in a conversation with someone in the lobby. You know you hear from God when you hear the Bible read, as we do each week. Be on the lookout.

Third, be open to different expressions of God's presence. God might want to show up in a way different than what you are used to. Let him. Maybe we're singing and you sense a prompt to raise your hands in worship. If you've never done that before, it might be easy to ignore that prompt. Maybe you are a strict hands at the side worship singer. Be open to responding to God's prompt, and you will experience more of his presence.

Maybe someone is praying for you and tells you something they hear God saying -- a prophetic word. If you are not used to that, it might be startling, but if you stay open you might experience God in a more powerful way than ever. Don't try to tame God or box him in.

Fourth, say "Yes" to his lead. **Romans 12:2** *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.* Worship is not just stirring an emotional response or singing to God, though we

sing when we worship. It is not about listening to a sermon or praying or seeing friends, though we do those things when we worship. Ultimately worship is offering ourselves to God for His glory. And that happens when we say “yes’ to God’s leading in our lives.

We come to present ourselves to him. When the prophet Isaiah had a vision of God while he worshiped in the temple, Isaiah responded by saying, “Here I am, Lord, send me.” He offered himself to God as a living sacrifice; one who said “Yes” to God.

Worship leader and composer Marty Nystrom observes: “I do a lot of traveling and witnessing on airplanes. I’ve heard over and over again, “Well, I’ve been to church before and, yea, it was good, but it’s not really my thing.” I’ve had people say “Well, I’ve read the Bible and it’s a good book, but I study the Loran too; there’s some wisdom there, too. But I’ve never had anybody look me in the eye and say, “You know, I’ve experienced the presence of God, and quite honestly, I don’t want it.” NO one has ever said that to me. Because people who experience the real presence of God are changed from the ordinary. They want more of him!

I believe you want more of Him, or otherwise you wouldn’t be here today. Let’s take a few moments and tell God we want more of Him, and be confident that He is here with us like he promised.