

Worship That Pierces the Heart

Bible Verses Referenced: Hebrews 1:14, Hebrews 2:14, Hebrews 4:12-16, Psalm 8, Genesis 1:3, John 1:1

How cute. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for the gift of your little ones and for the privilege it is to come and worship in Your presence. We ask that Your Holy Spirit would like a sword pierce our hearts and draw us into Your love and to Your presence, to Your throne of grace, as the writer of Hebrews called it, through the mediation and the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our great high priest.

It's in His name we pray. Amen. Please be seated. When I was a brand new Christian at the University of Florida, that blessed institution who haven't been playing particularly great with football, but we still love them. I was junior year of college and I was invited as a part of our church that I was going to go to a juvenile detention center, a place where young teenagers were, in a sense, in prison.

And so I went and I sat and I was assigned to a particular guy and I sat down with him and he says, "I want to ask you a question about the Bible." And I said, "Oh, good. I'm going to be able to really help this guy." And so the question was is, why as Christians, do we worship God on the first day of the week as our Sabbath when the Lord commands that we're supposed to worship on the seventh day of the week?

And I was like, oh no. I asked him, I said, do you just sit around and read the Bible all day and think? And he's like, yeah, of course. What else am I going to do? And I learned that I didn't know the Scriptures very well in that moment, and I got humbled in a really great way. But it's a great question, actually. Why do Christians worship on the first day of the week and not the last day of the week?

And the answer is because that's the Lord's day. That's the day of resurrection and new life in Him. And as new covenant followers of God, we have the revelation of Jesus Christ as the supreme Word of God and the great high priest who has given His life for us on the cross in order that He might, through His resurrected life, give us new life and eternal life in His name.

That's the gospel, the great salvation, the incredible message of God that's available to us who believe. And so we celebrate that Day of Resurrection. The early Church actually called the Lord's Day the eighth day of the week. It's kind of a day between days, a special day that we call today where we actually are not just completing the old creation and what God has been doing up to this point.

But we are stepping into the new life and the eternal life that God is leading us to as His promised children. And so it is the Lord's Day that we celebrate, and that is today, of course. And I really mean like today. There's another one that's being taken out. We're very blessed and privileged to be able to enter into the throne room of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

And yet, as a people, and especially in the United States of America in our day and age, we have taken that for granted in a way that is, in some ways, unprecedented. There's a recent book that's called The Great De Churching of America. The United States has actually been a very strong Christian nation for the most part. It's not to say that everybody that's a U.S.

citizen follows Jesus, or we have a melting pot. We have all different types of religions and faiths that are part of this country. But as a general population, we have been a Christian believing population, a church-going population. But in the last 25 years, 40 million people that's with an M. 40 million have stopped attending church.

And it's gotten the attention of those who study such things where they've started to research it and really ask pointed questions about the de-church. Why are you leaving? Why are you leaving the church? And of course, there are the typical answers, well, because of the controversies in the church, whether it's, you know, child sex abuse priest scandals or because the church has grown this way or that way or hurt from a pastor.

There are those types of things. But what really surprised the author of the book, *The Great De Churching*, is that for the most part, the answers given were very mundane. This was what he writes. He says, "For some, the decision is rooted in deep pain, but for the majority, their reasons for leaving are a lot more mundane than you would expect."

Most people have left for really pedestrian reasons like, "I moved." Or "attendance was just kind of inconvenient," or "family change." The writer of *Hebrews* is actually concerned about this very thing. What his big concern about is that people will sort of give up on the faith, that they will drift away from the Lord for mundane things or for serious things.

But for one reason or another, they stop participating in and striving to enter into the Sabbath of God. And what it really boils down to is our hearts. And it's all about worship and the worship of our hearts. Our hearts are designed by God to worship. One of the favorite quotes that you'll hear me say again and again.

I've already used it once with you, and you'll hear it again. But C.S. Lewis in his book, *Reflection on the Psalms*, is talking about the Westminster Catechism of Faith, which is the Presbyterian catechism. And the first question of the catechism is, what is the chief end of man? In other words, what is the reason why human beings were put on this planet? What is our purpose? What is the chief end of man? The answer is, does anybody know?

Do we have any Presbyterians in here that have snuck into the Episcopal Church? Do you know the answer? What is it? What's the chief end of man? Wow, that's great. Yes, yay, good job. In case you didn't hear her, the chief end of man is to enjoy God and to glorify Him forever.

In other words, our purpose is to delight in the Lord and to praise Him or to glorify Him, to worship Him. Now, what C.S. Lewis reflects on with that is very instructive. He says, "To enjoy something is to glorify something." And he gives a lot of different examples about how we just do this naturally. This is the way that we're wired, is that we worship that which we enjoy.

I mean, think about the way you know people who are in love with one another. They can't stop praising one another. Why? Because they enjoy one another. Look at how beautiful you are today. I just love being with you. But we do this with all kinds of things. You know C.S. Lewis says, you know readers do it. You love your favorite book. You enjoyed a book.

And so you go, "This was a great book!" Or you are walking outside and you go into the North Carolina mountains, which have been hurting recently, but you look at the beautiful vista and you go, "Isn't that amazing and how wonderful?" In other words, what comes out of our mouth is praise because we delight in it. We enjoy it. Yesterday, I got to get out on the St.

John's River, which you know as I was filling up the boat with gas, there's a lot of debris in the river, you know big pieces of docks and things like that. And the guy that was pumping my gas, he says, "You're awful brave to be out in the boat on the river today with all this stuff out there." And I think that's a very kind way of saying, "You're not very smart." There's a fine line between bravery and stupidity, I think. But boy, we're the fish biting.

And so I was just having the best time out there and I was really enjoying it. And I can see how people could worship fishing and make an idol out of that, or chasing the little white ball, or going on vacations, or having a lot of money, or whatever it is, right? Because whatever captivates our hearts that we enjoy, that actually can become the very thing that we center our lives on and that we worship.

One of the things that one more thing about C.S. Lewis' reflection on all this is he says, "It's really worship is not completed until it is expressed and shared with another person. You know, like yesterday, I was out fishing by myself, and so nobody could see these amazing fish that I was catching. And so what did I do? I took pictures and shared them with several people and said, "Isn't this wonderful?" But that's what we do.

In our faith, our religion is not solitary. When we come into the presence of the living God, our hearts go, "Isn't God great?" And it's wonderful and it's not completed until we actually have somebody next

to us who we can share it with. Wasn't that a great sermon or wasn't the music just glorious or isn't this beautiful or however you would express it, but the entering into the praise of the living God is not complete until we share it with another person.

And this is what the writer of Hebrews is worried about, is that our hearts would be tempted by all of the various distractions and challenges and difficulties and temptations of this world to move away from the Lord, to drift away, to get, in a sense, de-churched. And not only does the world have lots of temptations, but we actually have an enemy who is going after our hearts, Satan, and the spiritual forces of evil.

We have a couple of candidates who are about to be baptized in just a moment. And one of the things that they will be renouncing, which we who are members of the Church have already renounced and are supposed to continue to renounce, are the spiritual forces of evil which are seeking to draw us away from the love of God. Again, C.S. Lewis in a different book called *The Screwtape Letters* writes about two demons who are interacting with each other.

There's Uncle Screwtape and his nephew, Wormwood, who he calls his uncle my affectionate uncle. And these two demons are trying to take this young man who is giving his life to the Lord and draw him away from God, who the demons call their enemy.

And they're riding back and forth with all their different strategies, which include things like distraction and preoccupation, using subtlety with temptations, you know getting you to just go a little bit and not the whole way at first, and so they can just gradually, the gradual method. Exploiting difficulties in relationships, undermining prayer and prayer time, encouraging spiritual pride so that they can have a spiritual fall.

Using materialism and secularism to the advantage to get the mind away from that which is spiritual and real. Twisting of virtue, using fear and anxiety, encouraging hypocrisy, promoting despair and hopelessness, doubt, and cynicism. In other words, there's a playbook for evil.

And what the writer of Scripture writes, or Hebrews writes, is that the Word of God is like a sword that can pierce right to the core of our being and judge the thoughts and intentions of our hearts so that we can be laid bare before the Lord. One of the things that we pray every Sunday, though we didn't pray it this Sunday because of the baptism, but one of the things we pray every Sunday is, "Almighty God, to you, all desires are known, or all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you what?

No secrets are hid." Let me say, "Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name." And what we're saying is that when we come into the presence of the living God, we know that God's Word is that sharp two-edged sword, and there is nothing that we can do like Adam and Eve to sow fig leaves on ourselves and hide in our guilt and shame because He sees us.

And He knows us and He knows what we're feeling. He knows what temptations we've gone through. He knows the difficulties. He knows the state of our hearts. He knows what we'd rather be doing than sitting in church. He knows it all. And He penetrates us with the power of His Word in order that He might grab our attention so that our hearts could be set free from the challenges and difficulties and temptations of this world and the evil one and wholly devoted and dedicated to the right worship of the Lord.

And that's what the second thing that the writer of Hebrews says is not only does the Word of God, which is what we're participating in right now, but we actually have a great high priest who has had the entire playbook of Satan thrown at him. Everything in *screw tape letters* and more Jesus has gone through and not just experienced it and fought through it and battled through it just like you have.

But he's gone all the way to the bitter end of everything that Satan has had to throw at him, all the way to the point of giving his life as a ransom for us. And so what the writer of Hebrews says is that when you come into the throne room and you have the Word of God piercing your heart and convicting you

of places where maybe you've fallen short over the course of this week or in your life, the great high priest is here as well, Jesus.

And he knows exactly what you did or what you're struggling with or where your heart is. And he's been there. He gets you. It was a Super Bowl commercial that played it a couple of years ago. He gets us. Remember that one? He gets us. Why? Because he's been there. He's done it.

He's struggled through grief and shame and all the things that evil has to throw at us. And He wants to help you. And that's why we come here every Sunday on the Sabbath day, the Lord's Day.

To have our hearts pierced and penetrated by the Word of God, and then this is the transition that the writer of Hebrews is making, to draw near to this table, to the throne of grace, and commune with our great high priest, Jesus, and find mercy and help in our time of need.

Not from somebody that is so transcendent and out there and other, but one who has become like us in every way, who calls us brothers and sisters, and is participating with us through this challenging wilderness of life to lead us into that ultimate eternal life that he's holding out for us.

And so we allow ourselves to be pierced on a Sunday morning so that we can be drawn in to the throne of grace with the gift of our great high priest. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank You so much for the gift of Your Son, Jesus, our real worship leader who wants our hearts to be wholly devoted to Him and not captivated by the things of this world.

So I pray that You, through Your Word, would convict all of us of places in our lives where we have allowed our hearts to be distracted and moved away from You, and that through the grace of the Great High Priest, that you would draw us into your throne room, that we might approach it with boldness this morning through the gift of His mediation and His grace.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.