

# Gathering for Worship

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Hebrews 10 and verse 19. Hebrews 10 and verse 19.

And having our bodies washed with pure water, let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we study. Father, why don't you speak to us this morning?

Father, we want to hear your voice and we hear your voice when we see into scripture clearly, not just with our minds, but with our hearts.

[ 1 : 2 4 ]     And so I pray this morning you would meet with us in your word and we would see glorious things about you that would cause us to worship. And we see the wonder of your son and how he has brought us near to be able to worship.

Bless us now in your word we pray for Christ's sake. Amen. Amen. So we're in week two of a series on worship. Last week I didn't have a title and then I thought, you know, it's bad we don't have a title.

So we decided to title the series after last week's sermon, which is made to worship. It's kind of generic, doesn't offend anybody. It doesn't alliterate or anything like that, but it's catchy. Made to worship.

So that's what we're thinking about. We're thinking about worship. And like I said last week, although we're doing some sort of definitional groundwork last week and this week, what we're really talking about in this series is Sunday worship.

What we do when we gather here for worship on a Sunday. Now last week we looked at definitions. What is the definition of worship? And I said probably the succinct, simple definition of worship you find in the Psalms is this whole thing, this whole idea of ascribing glory to God.

[ 2 : 3 5 ]     Ascribing the glory due God. Giving God the worth that is due Him. Then we looked at what do we do in worship and we started with the wildest possible lens we could.

Which is Romans chapter 12 where it says, Offer your bodies as living sacrifices in view of God's mercy. This is your true and proper worship. So basically this idea that all of your life lived in obedience to God, trusting in God, that's worship in the broader sense of it.

That's how you ascribe the glory due His name, by giving your entire life in trust and obedience to God. That's your sacrifice. Now that starting point of what we might call all of life worship, sometimes trips up some Christians.

Particularly then when it comes to gathering for specific times of worship. So the logic kind of goes a little bit like this. A person will say, You know what?

I believe in Jesus. I trust in Him for my salvation. I live a life that's, as imperfectly as it is, in line with Christian conduct.

- [ 3 : 43 ] I'm trying to worship Him with all of my life, like Romans chapter 12 says, like Paul says, why do I then need to still go and worship at a particular church on Sundays?
- I'm doing this stuff. I'm doing all of life worship. Why do I need to go to dedicated times of worship? Now, what would we say to a person who said something like that, or who believed something like that?
- That's what I want us to explore this morning. And I've got two kind of simple directions we're going to go. We're going to first look at arguments against gathering for worship. And then we're going to look at arguments for gathering for worship.
- Arguments against and arguments for. So let's start with some of the arguments against gathering for worship. A person says, look, I worship God with all of my life. Why do I need to, why do we need to gather regularly for worship?
- If we're already de facto worshipping, by just being obedient and trusting in Jesus. Now, there is a lazy kind of simplistic version of this argument that's driven by just not wanting to deal with the hassle of having to go to church on a Sunday morning.
- [ 4 : 50 ] Like, just want to sleep in. Don't want to deal with people. Like, why do I have to deal with people? Complicated people. Or just to sleep in. I don't like the idea of having my calendar regimented by this sort of Sunday habit or routine.
- So there is a lazy version of this argument. I'm not going to deal with that. Like, if that's your argument, well, then you need to deal with that, I think. But there's a more sophisticated version that points to the New Testament and says, well, actually, you know, this is what the New Testament itself teaches.
- The key passage in this sort of discussion you will find in the Gospel of John, in John chapter 4, when Jesus engages with a Samaritan woman by the well. Jesus and this woman get into something of a theological debate around worship, but the differences between Jewish worship and Samaritan worship there in the first century.
- So here's John 4, verse 19. So, the woman said, I can see that you are a prophet. So she's kind of buttering Jesus up here a little bit as she gets in here.
- She says, Our ancestors, the Samaritans, worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place we must worship is in Jerusalem. Jesus turns around and says, Woman, believe me, a time is coming when we will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.
- [ 6 : 11 ] You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks.
- God is spirit, and His worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth. So some people will look at a passage like that, an interaction that Jesus has, and they will go, What do you see?
- It's not about a place. It's not about a time. It's about worshipping God in spirit and truth, which is kind of all the time, isn't it?
- Going to a worship assembly, where we assemble, where we gather together, that's like Old Testament worship, with the temple, and all that ceremonial paraphernalia, that's all been passed away, it's gone now that Jesus has come.
- We don't need to go and worship. We're always worshipping, with all of our lives. Now think about the fruit of that kind of thinking, what comes out of it.
- [ 7 : 15 ] The fruit of that kind of thinking is that gathering on Sunday is really an optional extra. If it helps you, with your all of life worship, well then by all means, do it, but it's not essential.

You can download sermons online, great sermons, way better than the sermons I can preach. You can get worship music online. Now my wife was in the band, so I have to be careful about saying whether it's better or not than the worship you can get here, but you can get worship music online.

You can pray and do personal devotion at home, by yourself, at your own time, at your own pace, on a different day of the week, or any other days of the week for that matter.

I think when COVID came along, we saw just how prevalent this kind of thinking is in evangelical churches. Because when it came to try and get people to come back to church, all sorts of people were scrambling, both pastors and ordinary Christians, were really scrambling to try and find theological and biblical justification to be able to say to their friends, you should come back to church now.

You really need to come back to church. You need to come back to worship. See, because if you've been in a culture that you've spent decades sort of devaluing the worship gathering and overemphasizing all-of-life worship, well then, you probably shouldn't be very surprised that people aren't exactly rushing back to worship after spending months of watching it online in their PJs.

[ 8 : 49 ] So that's one kind of biblical argument there. But then there's actually an even more sophisticated argument against gathering for worship that is prevalent in some very strongly Bible-believing churches as well.

And this argument comes from people who generally say that, biblically speaking, it's actually really important that Christians gather, that they come together, that they assemble, and they gather to sing and to pray and to study the Word.

But they would say, we shouldn't call that worship because now all of life in the New Testament is worship. Now you might actually be surprised to hear that this was actually a view that I myself believed about 20 years ago and taught to the point that my professor of church and worship had to take me for a coffee after the lecture one day to kind of say, Stephen, I'm not so sure about this, but I was quite entrenched in this particular view many years ago.

The argument basically goes like this. If you look at the New Testament, whenever Christians gather, the language of worship is largely absent. What instead we see is teaching and sort of mutual edification amongst believers.

And so they'll point to key passages in the New Testament like Colossians. Colossians 3.16, let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

[ 10 : 20 ] And they say, look, Christian gatherings obviously have some sort of vertical component to them because we're praying to God and we're singing to God, we're listening to God's Word. But passages like this seem to stress the horizontal component of Christian gatherings.

Paul says, let the Word of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with the stress on the one another. It's a similar passage, Ephesians 5.19, kind of starting at the back end of verse 18, says, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit.

Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord. So they would say, you see, this is mutual edification. Mutual edification is what Paul has in mind for Christian gatherings. He doesn't have Old Testament worship language for the Christian gathering because all of life is now worship.

He says that in Romans 12. And what I want to say is I am very, very grateful for the reminder that worship must extend to every single part of your life. I mean, I preached it last week.

I hope you believe that and think it's critically important. I'm also really grateful for the commitment that these more sophisticated arguments have for Christians regularly gathering.

[ 11 : 39 ] They're saying, like, you've got to get together. It's not, it's not, it's not a, an optional extra. We should be gathering. You can't privatize your faith and just sort of do it by yourself. So I'm grateful for that.

I'm grateful for the emphasis on horizontal relationships and that sort of mutual edification aspect for our gatherings. There is a very real sense in which we do speak to each other.

We do encourage each other as we sing, as we pray, as we confess our sins together on a Sunday. There is a horizontal dynamic going on here as we worship.

So I'm grateful for a lot of this stuff. But I, friends, think it is a terrible, terrible mistake to not talk about what we do on Sundays as worship, to not describe this gathering as worship.

I think it's a terrible mistake because it can give you the sense that when it happens, or what happens here when we gather, is nothing more than a sort of informational meeting. Fellowship and information.

[ 12 : 45 ] That we aren't encountering the triune God. See, friends, we don't need, we don't need just more education. We don't need just more mutual encouragement.

We need, you, me, we need an encounter with God because it is in Him, and we saw this last week, it is in Him that all the glory dwells, all the wonder, all the awe, all the majesty.

We just sang about that. It's in Him that that dwells, and we've got history to be able to look back at. We can look back at, and we can see that mere education does not fix the human condition. We can see that just having social packs and getting together and saying, keep going to each other, that doesn't fix the human condition.

No amount of that sort of stuff is going to fix us. Only an encounter with the divine is going to fix us. Only that can heal broken humanity. That's why God took on flesh.

That's why we have the doctrine of the incarnation. That's why Jesus came near to us and communed with us. We need that glory to be brought near. And when that glory is brought near and we encounter it, there is only one appropriate response.

[ 13 : 58 ] and that is that we fall on our faces and we worship. And so friends, I worry that if we strip worship language from our Sunday gatherings, we run the risk of losing or misunderstanding that divine encounter that is our very salvation.

Christians worship in all of life, but they especially gather to worship on the Lord's day. So those are the kind of arguments against.

Here's the argument for. Let me try and make a biblical argument for this now. Let me start with arguments that sort of come from observing the early practices and beliefs of the very first Christians and then we'll sort of come back to that text that we read at the beginning which is Hebrews 10.

So first we have to see that the early Christians in the New Testament placed significant importance it seems on gathering together regularly and here's the key part in ways that seem to mimic Old Testament worship patterns.

They've placed a high priority on gathering together but in ways that seem to mimic Old Testament worship patterns which would be strange if you don't think you need to gather for worship anymore.

[ 15 : 25 ] When we think of the Old Testament and we might think of the if we think of worship in the Old Testament we might think of the Sabbath and when we talk about the Sabbath we also talk about rest but there's a very key part to the Sabbath which is worshipping together.

So here's Leviticus 23 verse 3 there are six days when you may work but the seventh day is a day of Sabbath rest a day of sacred assembly.

You are not to do any work wherever you live it is a Sabbath to the Lord. So Sabbath isn't just about downing tools there it doesn't just say it's a day of rest Moses he says it's about gathering together or what he calls sacred assembly it's a worship gathering.

Now if all of that is gone since Jesus came and we sort of abolished the sacred secular divide so that all of life is worship then what we shouldn't expect is we shouldn't expect to see examples of Christians gathering for what look like New Testament worship services.

We shouldn't see that in the New Testament but we do. From the outset the very earliest Christians deliberately set aside times for worship. If you find gathering for worship once a week a bit of a struggle to fit into your calendar then please know that the various earliest records we have in Acts chapter 2 was them gathering every single day for worship.

[ 16 : 54 ] In fact from some early Christian documents we know that they gathered before sunrise to worship so be very thankful for 10am start times here. Then if you go deeper into the book of Acts you start to see some of these worship services so you see an example of what looks like a worship service in chapter 13 in the church in Antioch book of Acts.

You see descriptions of what look like worship services in the book of 1 Corinthians for several chapters chapter 10 all the way through to 14 and probably some of the stuff even earlier than that seem to be descriptions of a worship gathering.

You see that in 1 Timothy chapter 2 Paul seems to be regulating stuff that's happening in a worship service. You have Paul here's an interesting thing that I'd never seen and I actually didn't see anyone comment on this too much but Paul in Acts 24 he's on trial before the governor Felix and he explicitly says to Felix and to the people who are listening there he says I went down to Jerusalem to worship which is a pretty strange way of speaking about worship if you believe that now all of life is worship.

Like if you believe all of life is worship then why are you going to a specific place to go and worship? How can you worship before all of life is worship? And then if you look more closely you see some other things.

So it seems that Christians adopted one day in seven that pattern two for worship that you see in the Old Testament one day in seven for worship and not long after Jesus' death and resurrection they began setting aside Sunday the first day of the week as a day for Christian worship.

[ 18 : 27 ] Luke refers to this in Acts chapter 20 Paul refers to it in 1 Corinthians 6 and so you see some sort of a shift has happened in the early church. These early Christians who at that point were mostly Jewish moved their day of sacred assembly like Leviticus Leviticus instructed them Jewish Sabbath Saturday they moved it to Sunday they even started giving it a name they started calling it the Lord's Day there's a reference to this this is not just from extra biblical sources that we know about but there's even a reference to this in the Bible itself in Revelation chapter 1 verse 10 where the Apostle John talks about being in the Spirit on the Lord's Day so how did this shift happen this shift from Sabbath to Lord's Day it seems the most logical thing to conclude is that these apostles this early church took at least some of the

Old Testament theology of the Sabbath the idea of setting aside a day for rest and worshipful assembly and they transferred it from the Saturday the Jewish Sabbath to the Sunday the Christian Lord's Day or what I think we can rightly call the Christian Sabbath and thereby they demonstrated something they demonstrated that the Sabbath had been radically transformed by the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ so Jesus is right in John 4 there's a completely new way of worshipping but it's not so new that we don't worship anymore we don't gather for worship this day is being transformed now by the life death and resurrection of Christ particularly that last part the resurrection kind of most of our early historical evidence suggests that the first Christians picked Sunday as the day of worship because it's the day of the week on which Christ rose from the grave it's a day that marked rebirth renewal restoration recreation resurrection so although these early

Christians saw themselves as no longer under the old covenant law Paul's pretty explicit about that and therefore no longer under obligation to observe the old testament Sabbath with all those strict regulations the way it was set out there they do seem to still see themselves sitting aside a day of Sabbath worship and rest but one now that is radically transformed by Christ it's very different from the old testament one now you might hear all that sort of stuff and I could have given you several other examples there but you might say well look that's all what we might call descriptive descriptive sections of the bible of what the early Christians did where are the where's the prescriptive stuff where's the explicit commands in the new testament to go and worship as in go and gather on the lord's day and worship god well I think we have that actually and I think we have that in our passage

Hebrews chapter 10 specifically verses 24 to 25 so if you've got that open keep it there let me read particularly 24 to 25 let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds 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 now to surface reading of that passage it does seem like Christians are commanded there to not give up gathering together presumably for worship the old King James version of the bible says let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together which is probably a better translation than NIV that has those sort of Leviticus 23 overtones to it that sacred Sabbath assembly overtone to it so it sounds like the author of the book of Hebrews is talking about a worship service there right well as I pointed out at the very beginning obviously not everybody agrees

I remember a very prominent South African Christian leader a few years ago saying Hebrews 10 Hebrews 10 does not mandate Sunday attendance at worship all it says is that Christians can't practice their faith in isolation they need to be getting together gathering with other Christians from time to time but they could do that at a worship service on a Sunday at 10am or they could do that at a coffee shop with another Christian friend if they're opening the bible and talking about their faith together it's all worship really now that is a very very very common view let's investigate it let's look at the text and the context here so go all the way back to verse 19 the writer says therefore brothers and sisters since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way open for us through the curtain that is his body and since we have a great high priest over the house of God let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess for he who promised is faithful and then he goes on to the two verses we read don't give up meeting together now these verses actually cover some of the core teachings that you find in the book of Hebrews and they're all dripping with worship language

[ 24 : 13 ] Jesus is our great high priest is like the Old Testament worship leader our great mediator Jesus our worship leader has come and he's opened the way to God by his once and for all sacrifice sacrifices are how you engage in worship under the old covenant and so because Jesus our great worship leader has performed this act of worship this sacrifice we can draw near to God and hold on to the hope that we profess in fact there are three things the author says we should do in response to this good news that Jesus is our great high priest and he uses that refrain let us let us draw near to God let us hold unwaveringly to the hope that we profess and in the part in verse 24 and 25 let us consider how we might spur one another on to love and good deeds now those first two statements he actually talks about earlier on in the book of Hebrews draw near to God and hold on to your profession but now he adds a third one for the first time let us consider how we may spur!

life worship right let's live good lives caring for each other doing good deeds but part of that spurring each other on to love and good deeds that all of life worship is not giving up meeting together so I want you to follow the chain of logic here in verse 19 25 Jesus is the great high priest who opens up the way to God through the sacrifice of his love we respond by drawing near to God holding on to our profession and spurring each other on to love and good deeds which involves at least in part meeting together so whatever this meeting together is here it's a pretty key part if you go back up the chain of responding to the gospel responding to the good news the good news that Jesus our great high priest has opened our way back to God through his shed blood so it's pretty crucial when we understand what the author means when he's talking about getting together here gathering together here now this is where the original language is really really helpful and revealing in the original verse 25 literally reads don't abandon or don't desert our assembly that's why

I said I think the King James is a little bit better don't desert or don't abandon our assembly and there's a curious word there that's used for the word assembly it's a word and if you listen to this word I'll say the Greek word but you will know what this word kind of seems to refer to just by me saying it it's the word epi synagoge now what does that sound like sounds like the word synagogue doesn't it it's very closely related to the word synagogue and it is a word that is consistently used in a document which is the Greek version of the Old Testament something called the Septuagint to refer to moments of religious gathering religious worship it's a very similar word to a word that James uses in a part of the New Testament referring to something that sounds a lot like a Christian worship service so this is the common word that the people were used to using in their Old Testaments they were all reading generally Greek translations of the Old

Testament by this point the Septuagint that's what they had it's often what they're quoting from the New Testament authors not from the original Hebrew so this is a word they're used to hearing and reading about and it almost always pertains back to religious worship services in the Old Testament there are very strong religious worship gathering overtones of this language in verse 25 in some ways you don't need Greek to be able to see this because if you just get an older version the King James version and you put it next to Leviticus chapter 23 you're going it seems like it's talking about the same stuff it really doesn't seem to be speaking about general communal behavior among Christians it seems to be speaking about going to specific religious gatherings a worship service so I actually think we do have an explicit command in the New Testament to gather for worship and there's a much longer more complicated argument we could make around that word study there Sunday worship is not an optional part of the believer's life it's not a pragmatic element of our faith that we just do because it kind of helps us it's not a tradition where we just do this because our parents did it and their parents did it before them it's not a misapplication of the Old

Testament oh we're just carrying over some Old Testament stuff and still doing it but we really don't have to it's a deeply biblical practice one that I think if we neglect I think it's right to say that we are directly disobeying the word of God and then more than that we miss out on the power of meeting with God listen to Paul this is 1 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 4 this is really remarkable to think about because this can feel like a pretty ordinary gathering what we're doing here fairly ordinary in what's going on here but listen to what Paul says this is 1 Corinthians 5 verse 4 he's talking here about a person in the Corinthian church that is involved in a particularly heinous sin and he says this he says when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit and the power of our Lord Jesus is present hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the

[ 30 : 00 ] Lord now I don't want you to get distracted by the details of the discipline case that's going on there in 1 Corinthians that's a different sermon altogether but notice how he starts notice how he describes the assembly of God's people he uses a word for assembly that has the same root as the word that we have in Hebrews chapter 10 and he says when you assemble in this way this religious worship assembly the power of our Lord Jesus is present the power of our Lord Jesus is present in this ordinary moment right now as we sit here and we engage in worship the power of the Lord Jesus is present remember Jesus the one who walks on water the one who calms storms the one who raises people from the dead the one who casts out demons the one who heals the sick the power of Jesus that Jesus is present in this ordinary worship service God is in some way specially present in the worship assembling of his people there is a divine encounter happening here when we forsake worship we're running away from that we're running away from that divine encounter we're running away from the one thing that can truly fulfill our souls bind up and heal our aching hearts we're running away from the one true source of comfort that we have in this world the one true source of joy and peace that we have in this world we're running away from it when we forsake worship if God has drawn near to us through the shed blood of

Jesus Christ our great high priest then why would we want to run away from dedicated times that are given to us to draw near to him in faith so friends I say as the author of Hebrews says do not forsake the worship gathering don't forsake it now what does this mean for you and for me let me close with three things by way of application number one I think as Bible believing Christians we have to make Sunday worship with our Christian family a non negotiable part of Christian living to put it another way weekly worship must be a non-negotiable part of all of life worship it's not an optional extra that we can just kind of fit into our schedule when time allows it's something rather that we should build the rest of our schedule around maybe I really suck at productivity but AI and the algorithms of

YouTube and everything keeps wanting to send me adverts about productivity apps and scheduling apps well go out there and use all those different apps there but when you start to build your schedule in that apps it seems to me that the Bible says well there's an anchor at the core of that schedule and you build everything else around it and that anchor is worship several years ago there was a study done by the Pew Research Forum on worship attendance patterns in the US that found that among professing Christians the top reasons for non-attendance were not actually issues of theology or relational issues with the church members the top reasons for non-attendance were all practical reasons clashes with out of town holiday time clashes with family activities clashes with sport and exercise routines general tiredness at the end of the week general forgetfulness and laziness those are the top reasons a feeling a last one a feeling of not having enough time in the week to get everything accomplished at the time that research came out



I was part of a forum with a bunch of South African pastors online and we had a discussion about the findings and the general consensus that I could gauge from all the guys that we were talking to who are pastors of ordinary churches just like this across the country so this is more earthing it now in South Africa but the general consensus from my colleagues was that even our relatively committed members were coming to worship somewhere between one in three and two and four times so that's roughly just over 40% in attendance because I want to say this I don't think we can square that sort of attendance pattern with Hebrews chapter 10 verse 25 and the general teaching of the New Testament I think that attending worship that infrequently if you are a professing believer is in some ways just downright disobedience it's hard to see it as anything else other than that see I wonder

I wonder if those early Christians who got up before the sun came up together for worship under the fear of persecution I wonder if they were to come to us today to our churches today if they would have a hard time believing that we took our faith seriously Jesus is our great high priest at the cost of his life he has opened up access to God has made it possible for you to come into this worship service and draw near to God this morning you come and you draw near to God knowing knowing that he listens knowing that he hears your prayers knowing that he delights in your singing knowing that he forgives your sins that he encourages your heart Jesus has secured all of that by his great act of worship which is the sacrifice that he gives and so I say to myself and I say to us I say how dare we then treat this time of worship as an optional extra how dare we fail to prioritize this above every other trivial activity how dare we forsake the gathering together in worship as some of us are in the habit of doing the writer to the

[ 36 : 25 ] Hebrew says that's the first thing second thing this is not just about commanding us to come to a religious service it's about helping us it's about helping us to continue to walk in faith to walk in that Romans 12 all of life worship it's about the support it's about the encouragement it's about the tools that we need to keep going in Jesus that's the reason why if you looked a little bit further after verse 24 and 25 there are verses two verses or two or three verses that are about a warning of falling away because it's hard it is hard to keep going in Jesus holding on to that profession of faith we face all sorts of pressures all sorts of obstacles of distraction that cause us to forsake worship and then beyond that to forsake our profession in Christ we have cultural pressure we have social pressure we have the pressure of our own sinful hearts so we need help you need help

I need help we can't do this alone and so within the context of a worship gathering the author says let us consider how we may spur one another on to love and good deeds and encourage one another he says all the more as you see the day approaching you see this is where I agree with some of the people I disagree with that I spoke about in the beginning those the most sophisticated view that I talked about there when they say this is about mutual edification we need each other they're right we need each other we all hold on to that profession waiting for the day to come and we need each other to spur each other on to keep going and so church worship is not just about the vertical the vertical might be central and primary us and God but if that was all that was necessary you could just literally go home and listen to a sermon on your podcast you're still getting the vertical there to some extent but church is also about the horizontal

Christian to Christian God has created this church this earthly community structure for us as our resource as we pilgrimage on towards eternity it's for you to stand here to be able to see that person whose life is falling apart you know the circumstances of their life but they're singing praise to God because of the goodness and the mercy of God to them that's the horizontal thing going on there it's for your children to sit here and watch you as parents confessing your sin praising God for the grace of the gospel that's how you horizontally encourage them and speak to them and build them up in the faith there are all sorts of dynamics going on here as we worship together that feed that horizontal spurring on and encouraging one another as we wait for that day to come don't forsake the gathering for worship as some are in the habit of doing the author says but encourage one another and all the more as you see the day approaching third and final thing feast on grace we're going to do that in a second in a very visible way but feast on grace see maybe you listen to this and you feel a little bit beat up and weighed down by guilt as you think about your attendance at worship

I mean how many of you if we were somehow able to perfectly track everybody's attendance over the course of a year how many of you would like to have those statistics put up on the wall here how many of you would say I'm coming for that meeting I'm going to sit here and just feel good about myself in that meeting see maybe you do feel a bit beat up and weighed down by your guilt as you think about attendance and worship well then you need to hear this we are no longer under law we are under grace Paul writes this in Colossians chapter 2 he says when you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh God made you alive with Christ he forgave us all our sins having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness which stood against us and condemned us he has taken it away nailing it to the cross your standing Christian this morning your standing before God is based solely upon the justification that Christ has earned for you no amount of attendance at worship services can make you acceptable to

God no amount of worship services missed can take away your salvation Christ alone makes you acceptable Christ alone earns you your salvation salvation the Christian life is a life of grace not of performance any performance that we do in this life any performance we display has to have its root in the grace first given to us by Jesus we only perform in this life because Christ has already performed decisively for us we only worship you only come here and you get to worship this morning because Christ our great high priest our worship leader has worshipped God perfectly already he engaged in that perfect worship when he came and he offered his life as an atoning sacrifice that is the pinnacle of Old

[ 42 : 05 ] Testament worship is to sacrifice Jesus is worshipping when he goes to the cross and he's doing it for us because we can't worship because we get it wrong and we break down and we don't come to worship and we don't think worshipful thoughts when we're worshipping he goes and he worships at the cost of his life to bring us into worship he's opened the way through the curtain into the very presence of the almighty that we can sit here and experience the power of Christ grace grace is our basis for everything there will be times when illness and circumstances and yet and yes even laziness will disrupt your being in worship those are not times to wallow in guilt and feel like a substandard Christian before God those are times to be reminded and refreshed with grace to be reminded that your justification is in Christ alone not in the attendance of worship services friends can we give ourselves to worship not out of guilt but because of this incredible sacrifice that has been done for us that invites us to come in and to worship let's pray together our father and our king won't you make us worshipers this morning won't you help us to see how critical this time every Sunday morning is to come to worship together won't you see the need that we have to commune with the triune

God won't you see the need that we have to come and repeatedly rehearse in some ways the gospel story be reminded of that sacrifice be transformed and changed by it Lord father so many of us are callous in the way we think about worship it's just there and it's if it's convenient we'll go to it but if it's not we'll do something else Lord change that attitude in our hearts Lord let us build our lives our schedules around the worship of you and father I pray for any person who may be sitting here this morning who is in this worship gathering but is not actually a worshipper because they've never repented of their sin and trusted in Jesus for salvation they've never had the high priest offer the sacrifice on their behalf and thereby come into the family of God into the worshiping community of God as a saved redeemed child of God won't you let them see their sin this morning repent of it and trust in you for salvation father make us a church that has a high view of worship and gives ourselves to worship we pray and we ask this for Christ's sake in his glory amen