



“Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!” ~Psalm 95:6

# THE HEIDELBRIEF

News from Heidelberg Theological Seminary

January 2021

## The Joy of Worship



Rev. Chuck Muether, Director of Advancement

“What is the chief end of preaching? I like to think it is this. It is to give men and women a sense of God and His presence.” Those words from D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ classic

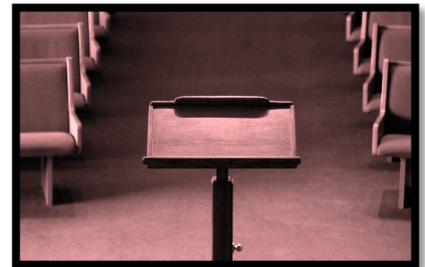
compilation of lectures, *Preaching and Preachers*, that he had spoken originally to the students of Westminster Theological Seminary in the spring of 1969.

One of my favorite admonitions from his book is a reminder to know and love your audience: “The trouble with some of us is that we love preaching, but we are not always careful to make sure that we love the people to whom we are actually preaching. If you lack this element of compassion for the people you will also lack the pathos which is a very vital element in all true preaching. Our Lord looked out upon the multitude and ‘saw them as sheep without a shepherd’, and was ‘filled with compassion. And if you know nothing of this you should not be in a pulpit, for this is certain to come out in your preaching.”



My favorite course as an M.Div. student was *Reformed Worship*, which was taught by the late Dr. Robert Grossmann. His biggest concern along with doctrinal orthodoxy was that the sheep be fed well and would

desire to return every Sunday to receive the living bread. Dr. Grossmann’s joy of preaching colored every lecture.



When I took Dr. Koerner’s D.Min class on Reformed worship, the joy of preaching was equally met with the joy of coming into the presence of God. Dr. K has a propensity of overusing the word “notion,” and my quotes of his lectures are filled with notions and notions and notions, but my favorite “Koerner notion” is this: “The notion of God coming to meet with His people and His people gathering to meet their God is the ultimate comfort, and joy for every believer who corporately worships.”

His course, as did Dr. Grossmann’s, beautifully articulated not just the elements, circumstances, and forms within corporate worship, but also the amazing dialogue that occurs between God and His people.

In this issue of The Heidelberg, we have transcribed a few segments from the first episode of the popular HTS podcast “From the Classroom” that speak to worship. Wooden Pulpit Media’s Pilgrim Talk Podcast host, Dr. Lee Johnson lends his talent to the HTS podcast to moderate a helpful discussion on worship between Drs. Koerner and Mosley. Enjoy.

# From the Classroom: *Worship is Meeting with God*

Drs. Lee Johnson, Maynard Koerner, and J.P. Mosley, Jr.

Podcast transcribed by Kevin Te Slaa

## **Dr. Maynard Koerner (MK):**

What is biblical worship? How do we practice biblical worship? At the core worship is meeting with God in meeting with one another.

## **Dr. J.P. Mosley (JPM):**

I would say since the very inception of the Church whether well even before Mount Sinai, there always has been an attack against the very worship of God. You go all the way back to Genesis Chapter 4. What's the issue between Abel and Cain? How they worshipped and what they brought to God as a sacrifice. One God favored, the other God didn't, and so what does Cain do? He rises up and he murders his brother. We don't need to be coming up with another way to worship which was what Cain was doing—worshipping God on his own terms. We need to be worshipping the way God has established. I think the other wonderful thing that you do see in Genesis 4 is God was there.

We worship in the presence of God, but we also worship in the presence of others. It is that you are there physically face to face. Corporate worship is not, I'll just watch it later or I'll listen to it later or let me read the manuscript at another time. No. Worship is a time sensitive, time-honored moment where you're actually in the presence of God with other people. I tongue-in-cheek sometimes will tell people if you have a hard time getting there on Sunday, what do you think heaven is going to be like? We're going to be with the people the whole time when we get to heaven in the presence of God and worship here is a taste of that. Abel tasted that as did Cain.

**MK:** To pick up on that. There is a term that Neo Orthodox advocates like to use: an encounter with God, but there's a biblical sense in which worship really is an encounter with God. It's a meeting with God.

## **Dr. Lee Johnson (LJ):**

So let me just throw this possible objection out then. God's omnipresent; we all agree on that. We're never apart from the presence of God, the highest mountain, the lowest depths of the sea. I can't get away from God, and since I am always meeting with God, why is worship then this special encounter with God?

**MK:** That's an excellent question, because obviously God is wherever we are, and so whether it's around the supper table with your family, you can even call that worship in a sense. But there is also, particularly brought out in the Old Testament, places where God is present. And it's different than when He is just always present. For example, when the Tabernacle is first opened up, or when the temple is dedicated, it talks about the presence of God coming into the Holy of Holies. In other words, there is a presence of God, which is special, which has to do with when we meet with God and worship; it's different than the ordinary presence of God in all life.

**JPM:** Absolutely, the biblical authors are very clear that God doesn't live in buildings made by hand, but yet it does say His presence was there, and so while we can understand God being across this whole world in everywhere present, it's when we enter into worship that we as sinners need to hear the saving grace of Jesus Christ continuing to be made holy by the Holy Spirit that has its root in the worship experience—that has its root there when we have God's word opened.



**JPM:** We live in a very, very wonderful time to have God's Word so accessible. You both have Bibles in front of you. I have a couple of Bible versions opened up on my computer. I could pull out my phone and have another Bible open. That used to not be the case, and so church used to be the place where you would gather to hear the Word of God. And I think we've taken it for granted that we have it so available. But I wonder in how many Christian homes today we would find dust on their Bibles, or they only pick it up when it's time to go to church on Sunday? You don't look at the text of the pastor's sermon until it's there on Sunday and then as a family you are now having to look at it. This is what we're talking about when we're talking about worship. Because of the fall there is that need to separate a certain time out of the week to where the body of Christ can gather, corporately gather, to celebrate and to hear of the saving news that God has redeemed them, that Christ has died for them, was raised from the dead for them and that the Spirit is applying that work in their lives.

**LJ:** So given the pandemic, why can't we have that meeting with God teleconferencing on Zoom? It's sort of like the old Brady Bunch intro where we're all in our little boxes. I mean, you often hear people say, we have to love our neighbor and that's why we stay away and worship remotely. Where would you go to Scripture to tell me that we really need to get together?

**MK:** I appreciate that question. I want to point out that there are times in which we are not able to meet physically—even here in the Midwest when we have a blizzard on Sunday morning, and it's dangerous to be on the road. And there are times in which for health reasons it is dangerous to go out and we recognize that. Now you mentioned Zoom, and I think teleconferencing is helpful in that way. It's sort of a two-edged thing in that it is great that we have that technological avenue, but it can easily become a crutch as well. Maybe it can become a way to get away from meeting together with God's people and come into his presence with worship.



**JPM:** Also when the author of Hebrews tells us not to neglect the assembling of ourselves together. When God is inspiring these authors to write these words, it's the same God that understood that Zoom was coming. This is the same God who said we still need to assemble together. He could have said well it'll be OK if you just stay home and then you'll just consider these passages on your own. God could have said that. Zoom wasn't around back then, but He didn't. He said, don't neglect the assembling together. Don't neglect the congregating together. Which hints that what you see throughout the Old Testament you see in the New Testament. You leave home to come with the other people now, yes, for those that are sick, the Bible gives them excuse to not come. Those that aren't well, and would say today they have pre-existing conditions.



The Bible actually gives them excuses, especially in our circumstance today to not be in worship. The church has existed in times where there was physical persecution. They still gathered for worship. They would hide out in catacombs, they would go out in the fields, go out in the desert. They would still gather and they knew that if they were caught, there was the potential of death.

At least you know they could lose their tongue or have their hand shot chopped off and be called a confessor at worst, which could also be understood at best they would be martyred and going to glory. We're not in that situation right now—not in this country. In this country,

what are we facing? We're facing an enemy. We still don't know much about it. It's a virus. It's a disease, and the Bible gives reasonable cause for people who are sick, who are not well, to stay at home.

**JPM:** And we need to impress upon people that the elders, on the other hand, are still told to go and visit the sick, pray over the sick. So there is that task and responsibility to church to be mindful of those that aren't well and not for us to sit back and make them feel guilty for not coming when they aren't well. I think we're missing something here. So while we say worship is to be in the presence of God's people on Sunday, Zoom is a great opportunity now. Just like at the Reformation, the printing press was a great opportunity to get sermons published and reach out to those shut-ins through the printed word. Now we can do far better. We can reach them live—it's not the same. I wouldn't say they're "worshiping" and I just put air quotes on for this podcast. No, I wouldn't say that, but they're still there hearing the word of God is that not a means of grace still?

**MK:** Well, I would think that we could also argue that, while Zoom is a great gift, and it does give us the opportunity to be able to at least have that, and we've always had shut-ins. It's just that now we have people who are shut-ins, not in traditional sense, but it's dangerous then to go out to worship and to other places as well. And that's fine. I'm not in any way trying to put a guilt trip on someone who really, truly ought to stay home because of health reasons, and that's a personal call, but I think there's also a sense that as the congregation meets, and they are a part of the congregation. They worship God all of their lives, perhaps that they still have that sense for them that the congregation is meeting while they're listening in. No, that can become an excuse to stay home when one really doesn't have to. And that's where the core problem is. So I want to be very careful not to put any kind of a guilt trip out there, but I think it's important that we simply start with what is worship. And then while the sermon is a big part of it, but let's start with the idea that worship is meeting with God. And when you meet with God, God talks to you and that's a big part of it.



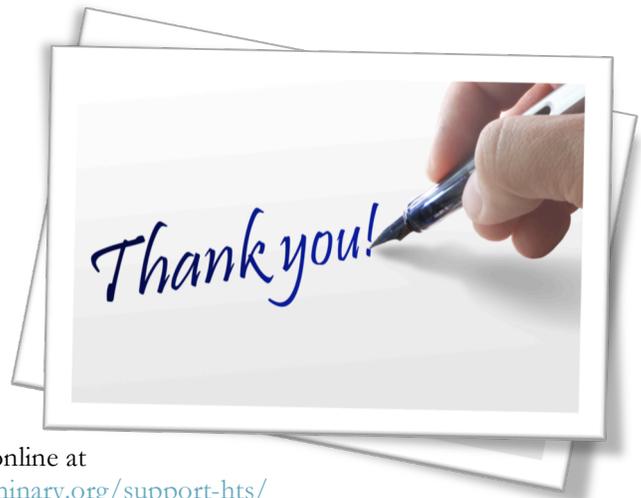
**JPM:** We will definitely get into the fact that worship has a dialogue to it where God speaks, called a worship salutation. And we respond with singing, prayer, confession.

**MK:** You know on the day after Pentecost, when the new church was beginning, not that it isn't a continuation of the Old Testament Church, but as they embraced Christ there, they met every day in fellowship with one another. That was important because it's not just between them and the Lord. It's a community of God's people. And I'm not suggesting we meet every day, but it demonstrates the importance that was for God's people.



Kevin Te Slaa,  
Executive  
Administrator

Thank you for your generous giving in 2020. The Covid-19 virus presented us with some financial challenges, but we praise God for the giving by our faithful constituents. We acknowledge and give thanks for the memorial gift given in honor of the late Mr. Terry Auch.



If you wish to donate,

support can be made online at

<https://heidelbergseminary.org/support-hts/>

or by mailing:

Heidelberg Theological Seminary  
7301 S. Louise Ave., Sioux Falls SD 57108

Reformed Worship Course Login

Contact HTS

Support HTS

