

The Glory of Our Gathering

Sovereign Grace Churches Pastors Conference 2025

Jon Payne | Hebrews 12:18-24

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My heart is full—I know yours is—I found myself just overwhelmed at the gift of God: so many preachers, and planters, and testimonies, and messages. And it strikes me, as I know it does you every year: “Who are we, Lord? And what is this people, that you have given us these kinds of people to serve, and to model, and to lead—and the humility, and the faith, and the sacrifice, and the joy?” Rightly we are called Sovereign Grace Churches.

I am looking forward to this final celebration of the glory of Christ. I believe the Lord has something in store for us in this final passage. So if you open your Bibles to Hebrews 12:18. I want to remind us of what Josh said and what Dr. Piper modeled - this is God's authoritative and life-giving word, and God intends to send us home filled with life through these verses. So, let's read it with that expectation.

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Lord, bless the preaching and the transformation of your word, in Jesus' name. Amen.

In July of this year, the Roanoke children's choir went to a choir festival. Now, there's nothing particularly unusual about that. I assume they're a choir; going to a choir festival is probably what they do. They worked hard, apparently, to prepare for this event—again, nothing particularly unusual. But what if I were to tell you that this choir festival was the International Youth Choir Festival, and this little local choir from Roanoke had been invited to travel to London, Canterbury, and Rochester, England. They would be singing at the Canterbury Cathedral, over a thousand years old. Furthermore, they would be granted an exclusive tour of Buckingham Palace, the royal residence of the kings and queens of England.

Now, that's just a little choir from Roanoke—nothing particularly special about them—but this performance was going to be in the halls of ancient worship, and they were going to walk the corridors of royalty. Sometimes, where you are makes all the difference. Sometimes, where you are makes all the difference.

This Sunday, four days from now—or three, if you're Australian—about 140 Sovereign Grace churches are going to gather to worship God. Thousands and thousands of Sovereign Grace members are going to gather together. They're going to hear God's word preached from some of you. They're going to sing Christ-centered songs. They're going to fellowship together. They are going to gather. They're going to assemble to worship God.

And it's possible, even for pastors and pastors' wives, long-term Christians, to take that seemingly ordinary, ongoing event for granted—to think of it as ordinary and unremarkable. But where you are sometimes makes all the difference.

When I talk to you right about the glory of our gathering, and here it is: we worship in Christ's heavenly assembly. We worship—you will worship—in Christ's heavenly assembly. Now, I know that this passage is rightly applied to all of the worship of God's people at all times, but since the passage specifically focuses on two gatherings, one in the Old Testament and one in the heavens, I think it is appropriate to particularly focus it on the gathering of God's people. The gathering of God's people is a gathering that by faith takes place in heaven.

Now, we know this, and I know that many of you preachers have preached this passage before, but my concern is that as the years, as the decades, as the generations pass, it's possible for the glory of that Sunday gathering to wane. It's possible that it becomes ordinary. It's possible that we go through the motions of preaching preparation, and song preparation, and greeting on Sunday, and pastoral prayers, and fellowship with a kind of religious routine, instead of a sense of awe and privilege and wonder and anticipation—a sense of overwhelming joy.

Do we realize where we are? Do we realize where we are? The writer of Hebrews is wanting us to see and to remember the glory of our worship. We rejoice in the glory of heavenly attendance by faith every Sunday morning. Our Sundays are not just a rehearsal for that event—though they are that as well—but a participation in that event by faith. Our little churches, our little churches that meet in living rooms, that meet in schools, sometimes that meet even in theaters and random strange locations all over the world—those little churches are actually just small ensembles in a greater choir. They're just small ensembles in a greater choir that God sees simultaneously. And where is that choir? In Christ's heavenly assembly.

And we need to see the glory of that gathering so that we go out of this delightful time together, looking forward to that glorious thing that's coming up just around the corner, and we return week after week. This writer wants us to receive this glory. He wants us to keep it in front of us, to be thrilled by it. So he makes two points, two points this afternoon: first, remember our past terror before Christ, and then rejoice in our heavenly glory in Christ. Remember and rejoice. He sets up his exaltation by way of a contrast, as you know and see there in the passage.

Remember Our Past Terror Before Christ

There are seven main elements in each of these descriptions, surely intentionally, and this opening section describes the gathering of Israel around Mount Sinai. The emphasis there in those first few verses is on the terror and the restricted access that the Israelites experienced under the old covenant. They came to a physical mountain, something that could be touched.

And as the writer will go on to say, they were worshiping at a place, at a literal, physical location that could be handled, unlike the current church that worships on a mountain that they cannot see. And he's writing to people who might prefer to go back to something they could see and touch, a covenant that could be handled, so to speak. And he is warning them—he is warning them—that what they could see and touch all contributed to their terror. All contributed to terror. He is warning them to not desire to go back to that thing they could see and touch.

And surely that's a reminder for us today. When we want to see and touch an earthly glory in our gathering, we are like those who want to go backwards instead of look forward. And this particular group of people, they need to be reminded that what they could see was terrifying. The fire blazed on the mountain. The darkness of the cloud brought a sense of mystery and uncertainty; gloom and tempest surely brought a sense of judgment and catastrophe and danger. The sound of the trumpet reminded them they were summoned to this holy mountain by the true and holy King, the King that brooks no rivals and allows no disloyalty. The experience at Sinai was physically terrifying. They're presented with a physical manifestation of God's holiness and the danger of God for sinners—even His own people, sinful as they were, were confronted, so to speak, by the holiness of God.

But more than any physical terror of the mountain was the terror of hearing the divine voice and warning. It's worth noting that what uniquely scared them to death was not actually the mountain or the symbols of God's presence; it was the voice telling them that if even an animal came close to this mountain, it must be killed—let alone idol-worshipping sinners. They were terrified, and they begged that that word not be spoken directly to them. They asked Moses to speak to them, and yet even Moses—even Moses—said he trembled with fear. Moses, the mediator, the man who had seen God do miraculous, mighty events in Egypt, trembled with fear to stand before the holiness of God on display in the mountain.

Now, actually, for us who were not Jews with Moses under the old covenant, Sinai was even better than our past experience before God. However terrifying this would be, they were at least God's chosen people coming to hear God's covenant, having been rescued from Egypt. We don't even get to look back on that kind of privilege. We had nothing but a judgmental voice to expect. We had already transgressed the boundaries of God's holiness, and no access would ever be granted based on our merits. Our past before Christ is nothing but terror. Nothing but horror, nothing but exile, nothing but judgment.

And this writer is not reluctant to remind them of their past before Christ. He intentionally does that, because it's through remembering our past that we see the glory of our present in Christ. We're prone—all human beings, all pastors, pastors' wives, churchgoers, Christians, humans—are prone to be presumptuous about our present access. So the Bible, in countless places—this is just one of them—helps us, God helps us, to see our present glory by looking back at our past terror.

And our worship has to include that reminder of our past terror so that we can see our present glory. We can't be squeamish about that or reluctant about that. Our gatherings to sing to the Lord must include this reminder of our past terror. And we need to remember this in particular, because our modern culture is more terrified of offending people than offending God. Our

modern culture—and certainly that has crept into our hearts and into our churches—is more terrified of offending people than offending God.

This has been going on for a long time. I think it's accelerated in our country in recent decades. But all the way back in 1937, H. Richard Niebuhr wrote the following about his great concerns about a modern social gospel.

He said this, famously:

"In their gospel, a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."

If we're afraid to remember our past terror, the result will be that our gospel of necessity will be a God without wrath, or we'll talk about men without sin, or perhaps a kingdom without judgment, and certainly a Christ without a cross. He wrote that almost 100 years ago. Don't we think he could say the same or worse today? We have to remember the past to see the glory of the present. We have to remember the terrors of the past. If we don't, we won't see the privilege and glory that God has given to us every time we come.

The church needs a worship that remembers the terror of life before Christ so that we can be freshly grateful for the glory we have in Christ. Listen, forgetting our past terror kills the glory of our gathering. It becomes just another religious self-help assembly. It becomes just another way to affirm people in their self-affirmation. It becomes just another way to connect with people of like-minded religious feeling. Oh, it is more glorious than that. It's more majestic than that. It's more incredibly privileged than that. But we won't see that unless we remember our past terror before Christ.

Forgetting God's holiness kills the glory of our gathering. Forgetting our former banishment kills the glory of our gathering. We must, brothers and sisters, we must, in that worship, look back and remember the terror so we can look up and see the glory.

There are surely people in our churches gripped by the sensitivity idol of the modern church. The modern church has a sensitivity idol. You don't carve it out of wood—it walks around in people's hearts. It's a sensitivity idol: nothing that offends my modern sensitivities can be allowed. Listen, in that kind of church and to that kind of person, this passage is outrageous. But this kind of past has to have a place in our church. It has to have a place in our preaching, in our singing, in our songs, in our fellowship. Why? So that the glory of our present privilege can be seen.

There are likely even unbelievers that gather on Sunday morning with us—perhaps children, perhaps guests, perhaps hidden hypocrites—that need to feel the heat of their current terror before Christ. Listen, the older we get, the more there will be church kids who are hypocrites in our churches. There has to be some sense of the reality of the terrors before Christ so that they desperately see their need for a better mountain. All of us need to remember the past terror so that we can see the present glory.

Now, I would encourage us to remember this terror personally. I want to speak especially to anybody who serves publicly: preachers, worship leaders. There's no substitute for remembering what you were before, personally. You can't preach the glories of our present privilege with the awe and the passion and the zeal that ought to be there unless you've spent a little time, on a regular basis, going back to the past terrors.

We had a first generation that didn't have to imagine what they would have been like as a sinner defying God, but we have a present generation, many of which—not all of which, but many of which—didn't live out the trajectory of their sin. But it's worth remembering that sins against light reveal what a monster we would have been in the dark—a monster. If a child who grew up in the light can sin the way I do, and so many do grow up in the church, what a monster we would have been if we had grown up in the dark. And it shouldn't take much meditation to go back to that moment, theologically speaking, when that monster was there under the terror of God's wrath, for us to be grateful that we grew up in the light and that we can now sing in the privilege of that present glory.

We need to remember it personally. We also need to remember it temporarily. Remember it temporarily. We don't linger on our past terror. We don't linger there—don't linger there. The reason to bring it up is to celebrate we are no longer there. Actually, in the Greek, the "not" is emphatic. That's what he's preaching. If he was preaching, that's what he's preaching.

And even today, in our presumptuous world, there are terrified legalists lurking in our hearts or in our churches that need the resounding "not" of this passage. We have not come to a place of terror. We have not come to a place of restricted access. We have not come to a place where drawing near brings the threat of death. We have not come to that mountain. Your gathering on Sunday is not the gathering of exiles outside of God's presence. You have not come to the place where you can't come near. You have not come to the place where you are terrified of God's judgment. You are not there anymore. We have not.

But we must remember our past terror before Christ for the goal of seeing and rejoicing in our present glory in Christ, in heaven. This Sunday, and every time the church worships, we have come to the glory of Christ gathered.

Rejoice in Our Heavenly Glory in Christ

Rejoice in our heavenly glory in Christ. Notice what he says: *"But you have come."* You have come. He's not saying you will come, though that is certainly true. He is saying that right now, by faith, in the mystery of God and the gift of Christ, and the union with the Spirit, you have come.

You have come—where? There are seven descriptions here. They are overwhelming. What have you come to? The royal city of the living God; to innumerable angels in joyful festival; to the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven; to God, the judge of all; 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.

Now, in that list of seven, there is a fullness of joy—unspeakable, and full of glory. And that is Sunday morning when you come. Joy unspeakable and full of glory. I just want you to imagine for a second: standing in the ocean as wave after wave—typically, when you're in the ocean, you have to wait for the next wave. Not in this passage. They just keep coming and coming and coming. Wave after wave—not of water, but of glory and privilege and access beyond beauty, beyond delight, beyond imagination. It just keeps rolling over us again and again and again.

What's the writer trying to do? Do you want to go back to what you can touch? Or do you want to stand here, where the waves of privilege and glory roll over you? Now please, have in mind as we walk through these briefly—have in mind your church. Not some great majestic church out there with some impressive preacher, some impressive worship—please have in mind your church, your church, your little church. Have that in mind. He's talking about you. He's talking about you standing in these waves of glory.

Where—let me put it this way—where does your church meet? Where does your church meet? I've been in churches that have met in the strangest places, and we have met in some strange ones over our history. Strange places. But really, we all meet in the same place.

Your church gathers first in God's personal royal city. Those three phrases are usually considered a unit: Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. It's pointing to that royal city, the city of conquest and safety and God's presence—all of the imagery of the Old Testament and the separation of that city, the royalty of David coming in with the gates opening—all of those images piled together into those phrases. And that's where my church meets. That's where I worship and you worship. Right now, we seem to be exiles in a world of a thousand competing loyalties and citizenships. But right now, when we worship, we're there in God's personal royal city. There are themes here of safety and dominion and majesty, and the privilege and prestige of being included in that city—the city where God dwells with His people. And we—yes, individually, but in a particular way in our gatherings—we are there.

This Sunday, you worship in the heavenly Jerusalem. This Sunday, you sing from its walls. You shout from its rooftops. The God of heaven, by His Spirit, is even now dwelling in the midst of the praises of His people. There is no more royal, prestigious location on earth than the assembly of God's people. And every true church is there, in the new Jerusalem, God's own dwelling place. And that is our Sunday location. We have come. We have come within the city by faith. We have come to God's own royal city, the victorious place of mighty protection, of privileged citizenship, of approval, of entrance.

We have come. Listen, what does this mean for our Sunday mornings? Our Sunday mornings should banish the fear of our exile existence on this earth. They should drive away the competing loyalties of this age. Any idolatry, craving a certain control or power over our lives or over the evil forces of this age, we should say, "I show up to worship in heaven. I am in the city of the living God by faith. These walls cannot be breached. These gates cannot be broken. This place is where God dwells." And, brothers and sisters, He dwells there, and by the Spirit, He dwells with the assembly of His people.

May Sovereign Grace churches always have Sunday mornings that are evidently expecting and believing that God is present among them. We are not merely gathering to walk through some religious mantra and say, "Yes, we believe God is present with His people." We're saying, "Right now, right now, God is present with His people, yes, by the Spirit, but also because by faith His people are present with Him." We worship in God's personal royal city. Let us have churches that act like it and worship like it, as if we live and sing and shout and kneel and listen and repent and fellowship and counsel—where?—on the streets of gold.

Your church gathers, too, in the midst of an angelic festival of joy. I love that phrase: "*to innumerable angels in festal gathering*." I have no idea what a festively arrayed angel looks like. But I would imagine if those people can terrify the way they do, they can party. I don't want to know what it looks like to come to an angel dressed out for a celebration. But that's where we worship. When you're standing there on Sunday by faith, you are standing next to an angel decked out for a celebration of God in His victory. You're singing in harmony with an angelic choir that counts this the celebration of the ages. They are harmonizing with your church on Sunday, this week—which is why, who cares what your band sounds like? And should we really worry nearly as much as we do if the bass player didn't show up? We're standing next to an angelic army, and I don't think they care how much we sound good on Sunday.

Listen, our Sundays should be filled with the joy of the Lord. Filled with the joy of the Lord. And by the grace of God, this has been a mark of our Sunday mornings for decades—may it always be. I remember when I was nine years old, I walked in to my first Sovereign Grace worship gathering, and it was a gathering of churches, and what was absolutely evident about this group of people was, wow, they were excited to sing to the Lord. It was almost like this was a big celebration. It was almost like a party of joy and exhilaration. It wasn't out of control. It was just exhilarating and exulting. There was decorum, but there was evident delight and joy, and it was almost like the angels were there and they were celebrating the victory of God in Christ.

We must have churches that feel that way on Sunday. Let me just appeal, pastors: Let Sunday be a celebration of joy for you. Can I just make a personal appeal to pastors about your personal worship of God on Sunday—both the singing and, if you preach, your preaching? Please let it look like you fit in to a joyful assembly of worshiping angels. Let your demeanor and your expressions and your physicality look like you have a place in that choir. May it be a model for our people that we, as pastors, walk in—what does it look like to see my pastor worship? The best way I can describe it: he is celebrating as if he's surrounded by angels in the city of God.

Worship leaders, can I appeal to you? It is unlikely that the church is going to exceed the joy of its pastors and its worship leaders. It's very unlikely. So if you worship dour, they're going to rise to the level of dour. But if you worship as if you are in the midst of an angelic assembly, what does that motivate God's people to do? "I guess we're supposed to be joyful around here. That's supposed to be the place of excitement. This is a place of enthusiasm, something's happening, something exciting has happened." Yes, it has. Yes, it has. Something exciting—you've got it. You've got it—something. And you know what? We can't wait to tell you. We want you to just watch us sing, and what you'll be left with is: "Something exciting has happened," and then we'll

preach, and we'll tell you what it was. We will tell you what it was. Something exciting has happened.

May it be, by the grace of God, that Sovereign Grace churches on Sunday would be places that these angels would be honored to visit and not concerned by. May they come saying, "Yes, yes, this, this, this is where I want to be. We're a part of this festival gathering."

Pastors' wives, let me appeal to you: Make Sunday a celebration of joy. Listen, nobody—nobody more than you or your husband—is aware of the sacrifice and costs pastors' wives make on Sunday morning, when the man is gone and the children contract demonic necessary needs. However, there is a great privilege in being a pastor's wife, precisely because you're not a pastor. And when you show up excited for the worship of God, you are modeling something for God's people. People could think that a joyful pastor is doing that because he's supposed to, but if you show up and you're excited to sing to the Lord Jesus, it doesn't matter if you have food stains all over you. And who cares? The angels don't care. You're there. So worship as if you're in the midst of an army of angels out for celebrating the victory of Christ. Let me encourage you.

Now, I can't do this without honoring my mom and dad. When your children see you worshipping with all your heart, if God be gracious, they will want to follow your example. I remember when I was very young, seeing them worshipping the Lord, and my dad is just leaping before the Lord in his place, and this older woman in the church came over and just said to me something to the effect of, "Do you see that? That is a privilege for you to be next to that." Maybe she was an angel.

This Sunday—don't postpone this to next year—this Sunday, we're all going to be there in four days. It's this Sunday. Go in like you're in the company of angels, in festal gathering, for the glory of Christ.

Your church gathers as and in the church of the firstborn, their names written permanently in heaven. The word "firstborn" is plural. If you thought, as you easily could have, this is just saying, "this is the church that belongs to Jesus, the firstborn," it certainly is that. But I think it's saying also that we all together are named for him. We all together. What that means is we walk in as people of the highest privilege and honor.

Have you ever been to a place where they have the VIP section, and it's the place you're not allowed to go? And you walk past and you kind of peer in there, and they have good food in there, and you can go get your nachos at the stand, but in there they seem to have, like, a buffet and really impressive things, and you can meet people and greet people. Listen, there is no more prestigious gathering than the assembly of the firstborn. Your church is in the assembly of the firstborn. Your church belongs to the firstborn, who is Jesus Christ, but in him you receive that privileged status. You are treated—you are treated as though you deserve that privilege, because you are in him. And not just some, not just a few, not just a few prestigious saints—no. All of our churches gather in the assembly of the firstborn. We have been elevated from exile to exaltation, from being outcasts to being privileged, from—if I can put it this way—from being those who should be punished to those who are treated like princes. That's how we worship God, how we are counted.

Never look down on your gathering. Never look down, never despise, never belittle, never allow that little bit of bitterness in your heart to look down on or apologize for or make excuses for the smallness or the meanness or the obscurity of your gathering. Have you ever been tempted to do that? Have you ever been tempted to walk in, and maybe a guest comes and you become instantly apologetic? "Oh, sorry, we don't really have coffee. I don't know where the signs are this morning, and boy, we're supposed to have a parking team, I'm not sure where they are. And yeah, usually there's more people on Sunday, usually, yeah, usually..." Have you felt that sense in your heart? I have, yeah, only at vacation. Vacation time, there's a lot of vacations. A lot of vacations right now. Normally it's just packed in here. I don't know what to tell you, but boy, people are usually passionate to be here.

Don't look down. This is the assembly of the firstborn. This is the assembly of the firstborn, saved in Christ and raised to glory. And when we gather, we are that assembly. Let's not look down on the gathering of our church.

To God, the judge of all. The God we worship with such joy and confidence is not less than the God of Sinai—not less holy, not less than the judge of all the earth. Isn't it the temptation of modern versions of the gospel to make grace a minimizing of the greatness of God? But the God before whom we have full access is God the judge of all. He's not less holy. We just actually have received that much grace. It's also quite possible that this reference to judgment is a reminder that there will be a vindication of those who have entrusted themselves to the King in the face of false judgments and the persecution of this world, so that on Sunday, we must be faithful to remind our people, you may be downtrodden in this earth, but there is a day coming when God's people will be vindicated by the judge of all.

Our church gathers with the spirits of departed saints, perfected in Christ. Oh, it has struck me again and again as I've thought about these dear brothers that have departed before us. We're still with them. We can't see them. We are still with them. And they have been perfected. They have been perfected. No more struggle with sin. No more weakness and limitation. They have been perfected in Christ. That means that when your church gathers, it is in the company of all of God's perfected people from the beginning of the world until now. Your church—your church—you know who attends? If I can put it this way, your church on Sunday, or more appropriately, you know who you attend with? Moses, David, Paul, James —Ken Mellinger, Larry Malament, Alan Redrup, and whoever of recent years has gone home from your dear gathering—you are worshipping with them, the spirits of departed saints, perfected in Christ.

Listen, we can't get into the idea that church is about just local pilgrims, toiling towards Zion without a sense of this grandeur. All of God's people—we're not just looking back at what they did, we're looking up at their current location, and then we find to our surprise: we are there with them. Who's your hero of the faith that's departed? You know you worship with him or her on Sunday? Just take that in for a minute. You attend, by faith, their gathering. If I can put it this way, you sing right next to them. Consider the glory of that when you worship.

Now, we come to the high point: we have come to Jesus. Where does my church meet? With Jesus. Who is this Jesus? He's the mediator of a new covenant. Our little churches worship in the presence, by faith, of Jesus Christ. He has brought us the new covenant of His grace and

forgiveness and permanent righteous standing in Him. What has the author been saying for twelve and a half chapters? The glory of Jesus is so far beyond any glory of that old covenant. He's not just someone that was glorious while on earth or that we will one day see in heaven, that has no current bearing on our worship—both are true. He's someone that we even now are worshiping before. You are singing to Jesus—not in some distant way, throwing out a song by messenger and hoping it reaches Him, shooting an arrow far into the distance and hoping somehow the Savior catches it and reads your personal prayer to Him. He's right there, the mediator of the new covenant—the covenant of access, the covenant of grace, the covenant of privilege, the covenant of glory, the King of righteousness and peace and justice and rule and dominion, pure and blameless beyond our imagination, the worship of angels, the delight of the Father, the glory of the Spirit—He is right there, and your church is with Him.

Our Sundays should be a joyful exaltation of His better covenant and His role as the eternal mediator.

And we've come to the blood that preaches grace. We have come to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. Oh, the sprinkled blood. What is present in that city? What is present? The sprinkled blood. What is present? The wounds that made me clean. What is present? The scars that paid for my sin. What is present? The pierced hands and side that covered my filthy sin.

What do we come to? We come to the sprinkled blood that speaks a much better word than the blood of Abel. Probably he references Abel, who was the first righteous slain, and then by that name reminds that there were many righteous slain over the ages—many, many righteous slain. Probably the readers knew some of them. But that blood could only cry out for vengeance and justice and hopelessness. But this blood—this blood does something more. Abel could not save us, but the blood of Christ—what does it speak? To sinners, salvation. To the lost, rescue. For those who need to be ransomed—that once we were dead, but now we are free; that once we were condemned, but now there is no condemnation. Why? Because we have come, and you will come this Sunday, to the blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Philip Hughes says,

"Abel's blood cried out for judgment, but Christ's cries out for mercy and pardon. To this precious blood of Jesus the citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem has come; and through faith and the atoning blood of his high priest, perfect sacrifice, the accusing voice of his past wickedness is silenced forever as the blood of the cross and Jesus speaks peace to his heart."

You know the privilege of pastoring? We get to say that every Sunday. We get to preach that every Sunday. Sing that every Sunday.

May our Sundays—brothers and sisters, may our Sundays—be unashamedly, passionately, and personally a coming in and through the blood of Christ. Brother preachers, let us preach Christ and him crucified until we die.

Where we are makes the difference. Pastor, are you discouraged, like Jeff often is, by your limited preaching? You've been chosen. You've been chosen to proclaim Christ, you know that, in the very hallways of heaven. God makes no mistakes in His preaching assignments.

Do you need fresh inspiration for your public prayers? You've been chosen to offer up intercession in the very throne room of grace, surrounded by the incense of the saints of all ages, your prayer perfected by the great intercessor Himself. And God welcomes every prayer of faith that falls from your lips. Listen, every expression of prayerful faith by every pastor echoes to the approving affirmation of myriads of angels. Are you excited for the pastoral prayer this Sunday?

Pastor's wife, do you wonder whether it matters if you show up on time, if you sing or don't sing, if you greet or don't greet, if you counsel at the end of the meeting or don't counsel? You've been chosen to be an example, a model for the saints of the honor of attending God's own royal assembly in the heavenly Jerusalem itself.

This Sunday, four days from now, and every seven days thereafter until we die, we will be, by faith, in the very city of God, among the angelic choir, before the judge of all, amidst perfected saints who have triumphed through their faith, singing and preaching and praying in the very presence of Christ Himself and covered perpetually by His preaching blood, the blood that preaches grace.

What a location our church is meeting in. To every one of our churches: see in our eyes, see in our tears, hear in our song, witness in our passion, the privilege of the glory of our gathering. May they see on Sundays a glimpse into the very reality of our attendance on the heavenly gathering of Christ.

Let Spurgeon, who is even now with us, remind us.

"Today, my brethren, you are participating in the great international gathering of all the people of God. Are you not glad to be here?"

And he says,

"I do want you to feel as if you were standing this morning in that great assembly, with spiritual exercises going on around you, such as struggling against sin, striving for the mastery over error, patiently enduring pain, and working holy work. The judge is looking on, with the crown in his hand, ready to place it upon each conqueror's head. The air breathes perfume and is full of music, for all around is joy. We are here amid the throng, not as spectators only, but sharing in the overflowing joy. Oh, the bliss of feeling that even now, heaven is begun below. And the sufferings of this present life are but a part of the glory of the Lord manifested in His people."

What a difference location makes.

Let's pray.

Lord, I want to pray specifically for this coming Sunday. I pray, Lord, that you would fill our eyes with the privilege of our worship at this assembly that joins. That assembly would be filled with honor and glory and joy. Lord, give us grace to preach you and your blood and to sing to you and your glory as those who are attending by faith that great church gathering. Give us grace, Lord, for all the decades into the future. Give us grace to see ourselves there by faith. In the name of Jesus.