

THE MEETING

Adapted from a tract by Rev. Roger Valci

Presented to Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, November 15, 2015

What is The Meeting? When you began your faith journey, were you ever told that to follow Jesus was to join The Meeting? You know... to go to church on Sunday.

Think about this. When you raised your hand to accept Jesus, or knelt in prayer to ask Christ into your heart... usually, one of the first things people are encouraged to do is to participate in The Meeting. Unfortunately, too often, no one actually sat down with us to explain what The Meeting was all about.

You may have kind of figured it out by observation, and then formed your own ideas about what should or should not be happening in this room. But rarely, if ever, have we had conversations about whether our ideas and opinions are the right ones. So, this morning, let's think together about The Meeting.

Expectations

Expectations of The Meeting are many, and often deeply emotional. As a result, addressing the subject of The Meeting may be challenging and difficult.

Some people think:

- It's all about the worship
- It's all about the preaching
- It's all about spiritual gifts
- It's all about fellowship
- We need more time for praying
- We need more singing
- We need more choirs, dramas, and videos

Some people are tempted to scorecard The Meeting:

- It's too long
- It's too boring
- It's repetitious and predictable
- Some of the people here are "too into it"
- Other around me aren't really paying attention
- The pastor's message didn't hit the mark
- The song service was dull
- The music was too loud

Still others say:

- “I don’t want to go to The Meeting. It’s for younger people; there’s nothing there for me.”
- “I don’t want to go to The Meeting. It’s for older people; there’s nothing there for me.”
- “I’m just not being fed there.”
- “My life has been so busy, I just don’t have the energy to go to The Meeting.”
- “I need to catch up on work, so I’ll have to pass on The Meeting this week.”
- “The Meeting cuts into my family time.”
- “My needs aren’t being met in The Meeting, so why go?”
- “If I don’t get to be on stage in The Meeting, why do I need to show up?”
- “I don’t like the current direction of The Meeting, so I won’t contribute my money.”
- “The pastor’s topic doesn’t pertain to me, so I’ll stay home and watch a TV preacher.”

And so on...

With such a great variety of expectations about The Meeting, it would be good for us to consider the answers to some basic questions, such as:

- Who called The Meeting?
- Who is invited to The Meeting?
- What is the agenda or focus of The Meeting?
- How often should I go to The Meeting?

To find Biblical answers to these questions, let’s revisit one of the first corporate meetings in the Scriptures: The Meeting at Mount Sinai.

The Sign of God’s People

To start our investigation about The Meeting, let’s eavesdrop on a conversation between God and Moses in the desert. Moses had been tending his father-in-law’s sheep, when he was startled to see a bush that was on fire. He turned aside to look. Although he could see the flames licking the branches, the bush was not consumed by the fire. Then, he heard a voice from within the flames, calling to him by name.

God was speaking to Moses. His words were about to change the course of Moses’ life. God assigned him to represent His people, who had been enslaved by the Egyptians for more than 400 years—to claim their freedom and demand their release, and lead them to a fertile land that God had prepared for them.

Moses was almost speechless. “Who? Me? Why should the Pharaoh listen to me?”

“God answered, ‘I will be with you. And this is your sign that I am the one who has sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God at this very mountain.’”
(Exodus 3:12)

What was “the sign” that God promised Moses? Was it the bush that burned yet was not consumed? Was it the ten awful plagues that God rained on the Egyptian people? We need not wonder or speculate, for the answer is in this very verse: “When you have brought the people out of Egypt, *you will worship God at this very mountain.*”

Corporate Worship

The release of the Hebrew people was not simply to free them *from* oppression, but to release them *to worship* God corporately. Essentially, the Book of Exodus is a communal worship manual. The last twenty-one chapters describe how God wanted His liberated people to worship Him.

The promised sign was God’s people worshipping, in a corporate or communal fashion, in the presence of God.

In fact, the sign of collective worship characterized God’s people through the periods of Joshua, the Judges, the Kings, and Israel’s exile in Assyria and Babylon. It was also the main issue of the years of restoration under the leadership of Nehemiah and Ezra. And it was still in full force during the days of Jesus—endorsed by the Lord and His disciples.

In summary, then, a distinguishing mark of God’s people is that they regularly and wholeheartedly gather together to worship God.

Whereas the rest of the world lives life each week according to their own needs and desires, God had said, “I want My people to cease from their pattern of work and play, and come together in My house and worship Me.”

When God mapped out the arrangement of the tribes of Israel in their encampment, the centerpiece of the camp was the Tabernacle, the place of The Meeting. When the Tabernacle was moved to the next destination, the people all packed up and moved with it. When the priests stopped and set up the Tabernacle, the people also stopped and pitched their tents surrounding it.

In fact, as you read the rest of the Bible you will find that the people who belonged to God planned not only their location but their lives around The Meeting—that is, they made time each week to gather in God’s house to worship. This sign distinguishes God’s people from others, and has been an established pattern for them since the Law was given at Mount Sinai.

With these things in mind, let me address those questions about The Meeting.

Q1: Who Called The Meeting?

One thing is clear from the text in Exodus: God called The Meeting. It wasn't the leadership. It wasn't the elders. It wasn't the church board. It wasn't even Pastor Moses. Wherever God's people are found, we gather together because God called The Meeting.

Now, in the business world, when your boss calls a meeting, you all show up... and on time, prepared, and ready to work. You don't make excuses. You don't make other plans. And you don't walk out in the middle of the meeting. We show up ready to do our part.

Aren't we willing to show God greater honor, loyalty, and allegiance than we give our human bosses? Sure they sign your paycheck, but God gave you your skills and the opportunity to use them on the job. And it was God who sent His Son to shed His blood in death on the cross to save your soul, and then sent His Spirit to dwell in your heart. Who loves you more?

Curious Church Trends

There are trends in our American churches that are difficult to understand. It appears that some people have fallen into patterns of irregular participation in The Meeting. For some it is a love of sports—golf, football, soccer. For others it is a love of or compulsion to work, or make repairs or upgrades on their homes. For some, a guest speaker (especially a missionary) is all the reason that they need to skip The Meeting. There is ample competition, yet God wants us to embrace the sacred pattern He has set before us as our lifestyle.

While an occasional absence is understandable, weeks or months of absence often betray something deeper and much more dangerous—an indifference to our Lord and Savior, or a stubborn rebellion against His ways.

Q2: Who Is Invited To The Meeting?

God invites everyone! Children, youth, adults, and seniors—they were all present in the first Meeting at Mount Sinai. They all shared the experience together.

Truth is, the history of segregating families by age on Sunday mornings is relatively new. It is not seen at all in the Bible. It is not evident for the first 19 centuries of church history. God invited everyone to The Meeting, and somehow they figured out how to share it together.

In the last 100 years, we have developed specializations that categorize people by age, gender, marital status, and worship styles. Children in one room. Teenagers in another. Single adults in the conference room. Adults in the sanctuary. Seniors in the fellowship hall. Hymns to the

right. Choruses to the left. Spiritual gifts and intercession in the back room. Expository preaching upstairs. Communion downstairs. You get the idea. Church leaders have tried to scratch where everyone itches, spreading limited resources over broad areas of ministry, sometimes resulting in divided congregations, volunteer burnout, and maintenance ministry.

At one level, segregation makes sense. Age level-appropriate formats and curricula help everyone to focus and learn. But God is the Savior of children as well as adults, singles and married couples, young and old, male and female. On some occasions we need to worship all together, blending all our tools and techniques and styles to serve a single multi-generational, multi-ethnic family.

If a child never shares in the Sunday service of worship during their formative years, they may never care to join as a teenager. And if teens cannot be a functional part of corporate worship, why would they want to continue as adults? This pattern could be a death blow for a church.

Keeping us apart cannot develop real love and peace. Worshipping together in the presence of God does. Segregation may simply be the result of concluding that it is too hard to love people who are not like you. That *is* a real challenge, but it is *our* challenge. And how we deal with that test is meant to be a witness for Christ to the world. Jesus said, *“Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”* (John 13:35)

God called The Meeting, and He has invited everyone. It is our faith-challenge to work that out together in practice.

Q3: What Is The Agenda Of The Meeting?

Some say The Meeting is about the visitor; we need to cater to their feelings and concerns.

Some say The Meeting is about their own ministry; unless they’re serving or on stage, they won’t show up.

Some say The Meeting is about promoting their pet project, leveraging the audience to peddle their idea, or their cause, or organization.

Some say The Meeting is about a deal they have struck with God (“I’ll give You an hour on Sunday, and the rest of the week, we’ll just wave at each other. Okay?”)

Some join The Meeting because their spouse or parent coerced them to come. They come in order to keep the peace at home.

Some join The Meeting only when Congress or Hallmark declare a special day—Valentine’s Day, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, or Christmas.

But *none* of these agendas are found in the Bible!

“Moses led them (all ages and every generation) out from the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.” (Exodus 19:17)

The American church has created some false images of what The Meeting is all about.

Let me be clear: The Meeting is not about you, your ministry, your spouse, your guest, or your religious obligation. It's about God. God called The Meeting. The Meeting is with God. God asks us to make it part of our weekly pattern of devotion, and to participate regularly.

God is not *a part* of The Meeting's agenda; He *is* the agenda.

Today's consumer society expects The Meeting to serve their preferences, their tastes, and their interests. But the Scriptures challenge us to examine ourselves honestly and rigorously to see whether or not our expectations line up with the Bible.

The Meeting is not about my comfort or yours. Throughout the Bible, The Meeting has had only one objective: God's honor and pleasure.

In the Old Testament, the priests labored tirelessly in the Tabernacle, then later in the Temple, to cultivate and invite the presence of God. It was both an awesome and fearful experience. No one dared to enter The Presence uninvited or unprepared. As people came to sacrifice and worship, the priest would ensure that God was honored in the manner He had ordained. The entire system—priests, garments, sacrifices, musicians, worshippers, feasts, and fasts—was designed for one purpose: to honor and please God.

Under the New Testament, the priesthood came to an end, as did the need for animal sacrifices. We no longer require a mediator in order to enter The Presence of God, for God Himself has chosen to dwell in human hearts. And still, the Scriptures affirm the people's habit of gathering each week to meet with God.

Despite all of the other changes, worship—the attitude of reverential fear of God—among God's people has not ceased.

It's About God's Honor And Pleasure

Remember The Meeting in Jerusalem? God killed Ananias and Sapphira for lying to the Holy Spirit and stealing God's glory for themselves (Acts 5:1-11).

How about The Meeting in Corinth? People became sick and died, as a result of making light of the presence and pleasure of God during Holy Communion (1 Corinthians 11:28-32).

Then there was The Meeting in Ephesus: People were warned that God would turn out the lights and close up shop because they had “left their first love” (Revelation 2:5).

And The Meeting in Rome: Paul warned that when we scorecard the perceived spirituality of a brother or sister we insult the beauty of God’s design and, thus, despise God the Designer (Romans 15:2-4).

Q4: How Often Should I Attend The Meeting?

Simple answer: every Sunday. According to the Old Testament pattern, God’s people worked six days, then ceased for the seventh day. Not for golf, football, soccer, or yard work, but for collective worship. That pattern began with God Himself on the seventh day of Creation (Genesis 2:2-3), and was also practiced in the wilderness wanderings of Exodus, when they gathered manna to eat. The same was reiterated in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). The people of God consummated each Sabbath with communal sacrifices (Numbers 28:9-10) until the nation’s exile. After that, they read and studied the Scriptures together in their synagogues (Ezra 7:10; Nehemiah 9:3).

In the New Testament, we find Jesus repeatedly in a synagogue or in the Temple on the Sabbath. He made weekly communal worship a regular pattern of His life (Luke 4:16). The Apostle Paul met with the Jews on the Sabbath to proclaim the Gospel, and then with the believers for Sunday worship (1 Corinthians 16:2).

From cover to cover in the Bible, God asks all those who follow Him to plan their lives around The Meeting—weekly communal worship in His house.

Then again, asking how often I should participate in The Meeting may be a revealing question, akin to, “What is the least amount of money a guy can spend on a date and still have the girl think he will sacrifice everything for her?” This question may betray a mindset that attempts to get by with minimal cost. It suggests that we have other “more important” elements in our lives, and we want to get this “requirement” out of the way so we can move on to those other things.

It’s sort of like telling your spouse, “I’ll just text you my sentiments this week, because I have too many other pressing issues in my life to actually spend time with you.” How do you think that would work?

The king of Israel had sinned and God sent an awful plague in judgment against the people. Thousands were dying, so King David prayed for God to interrupt the plague. God told the king

to build an altar for worship at a nearby threshing floor and He would stop the plague. David went to the owner of the farm to buy the land for the altar. But the farmer respectfully bowed to the ground and offered the land to the king for free, along with the wood for the fire and the oxen for the sacrifice.

“But the king replied to [the farmer], ‘No, I insist on buying it, for I will not present burnt offerings to the Lord my God that have cost me nothing.’” (2 Samuel 24:24) Your faith will cost you something. It may cost you much. That cost is the measure of your love for God in whom you trust. What has it cost you to follow Jesus?

The Bible does not say, “Honor The Meeting and keep it short.” It does say, “Honor the Sabbath,” where the central element is spending time together in God’s house for worship.

In The Presence Of Holy God

Perhaps we misunderstand what it means to come before Holy God. When God’s *omnipresence* turns into His *manifest presence*, everything changes.

At the burning bush, God told Moses, *“Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground”* (Exodus 3:5).

Upon seeing a vision of the Lord, the young prophet Isaiah cried out, *“It’s all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.”* (Isaiah 6:5).

Ezekiel fell on his face when he entered God’s throne room and saw the four living creatures and the vision of wheels (Ezekiel 1:28).

After fasting for three weeks, Daniel described the terror that overwhelmed him, and those who were with him, when God spoke to him through an angel (Daniel 10:4-17).

Jesus’ disciples fell facedown on the ground in terror, when Jesus was transfigured before them (Matthew 17:6).

Saul (Paul) was flattened on his back and blinded when the Glorified Christ appeared to him on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus (Acts 9:4-9).

John saw the Glorified Christ on the Lord’s Day, and fell to the ground as though dead (Revelation 1:9-18).

When God shows up, everything changes!

Do we really think God's glory has diminished just because we have free access to Him through Jesus?

Do we really think that when we arrive in Heaven, we will respond any differently than those I have just described?

When the glory of God descends in The Meeting, won't we also fall on our faces before Him and join the angels to cry out, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come!" (Revelation 4:8).

Has consumer Christianity turned your needs and wants and comforts into the centerpiece of The Meeting? Did it sound like any of the people I just described felt "comfortable" in the presence of God? Yet, in their terror, in the power of His presence, at the edge of divine glory, their lives were forever changed.

When each of them left The Meeting, they were never again satisfied with anything less than the beauty of God's presence. They were ruined for anything else.

Why Is The Meeting So Important?

The Meeting sets the tempo, fosters the climate, sustains the culture, and reinforces the identity for the local church. As The Meeting goes, so goes the entire ministry.

God longs to manifest Himself to His people. He is looking for open, hungry people who come to The Meeting to give, rather than get. He looks for those who enter God's house with anticipation and expectation to experience God's presence in The Meeting. Will you be one of those who are captivated by the presence of God? Will you be one who longs to meet with Him?

But What About The Visitor?

"Pastor, I'm embarrassed to bring someone to church if certain activities happen."

Let me respond to this issue with a couple of questions:

- When was the last time you brought someone to church? Did something actually offend them, or is that just an excuse that lives in your head?
- If God is delighted with people who kneel before Him, wave their hands or banners, sing, shout, dance for joy, or use spiritual gifts like tongues and interpretation or prophecy, should we refuse it because we are embarrassed? Does extravagant worship make you uncomfortable? If so, how do you think you will feel in Heaven (because, up there, they pretty well get it on!)?

Listen to this bird's eye view recorded in the Book of the Revelation:

Revelation 4:6-11 (NLT)

In the center and around the throne were four living beings, each covered with eyes, front and back. Day after day and night after night they keep on saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty— the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come."

Whenever the living beings give glory and honor and thanks to the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever), the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever). And they lay their crowns before the throne and say, "You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created all things, and they exist because you created what you pleased."

Revelation 5:1-14 (NLT)

Then I saw a scroll in the right hand of the one who was sitting on the throne. And when [the Lamb] took the scroll, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp, and they held gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of God's people.

And they sang a new song with these words: "You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals and open it. For you were slaughtered, and your blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. And you have caused them to become a Kingdom of priests for our God. And they will reign on the earth."

Then I looked again, and I heard the voices of thousands and millions of angels around the throne and of the living beings and the elders. And they sang in a mighty chorus: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered— to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing."

And then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea. They sang: "Blessing and honor and glory and power belong to the one sitting on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever."

And the four living beings said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped the Lamb.

How organic! How enthusiastic! How interactive! Like waves of glory, rippling out from the throne of God to the multitudes of the redeemed, and back again.

The Bible actually teaches that our worship is a witness for Christ.

In the Old Testament, foreigners were permitted in the Court of the Gentiles to observe the worship forms of the Jews. In the church in Corinth, Paul believed that the atmosphere of worship should cultivate such a dynamic presence of God that the visitor would be convicted of sin, feel safe to confess it freely, and fall down to worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!" (1 Corinthians 14:24-25).

Are you still eagerly excited about The Meeting each weekend? Compare the mindset of many of today's worshippers to the hunger and passion of the Psalmist who longed to gather with God's people in worship:

Psalm 84:1-12 (NLT)

"How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of Heaven's Armies. I long, yes, I faint with longing to enter the courts of the LORD. With my whole being, body and soul, I will shout joyfully to the living God.

"Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow builds her nest and raises her young at a place near your altar, O LORD of Heaven's Armies, my King and my God!

"What joy for those who can live in your house, always singing your praises. What joy for those whose strength comes from the LORD, who have set their minds on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. When they walk through the Valley of Weeping, it will become a place of refreshing springs. The autumn rains will clothe it with blessings. They will continue to grow stronger, and each of them will appear before God in Jerusalem.

"O LORD God of Heaven's Armies, hear my prayer. Listen, O God of Jacob. O God, look with favor upon the king, our shield! Show favor to the one you have anointed.

"A single day in your courts is better than a thousand anywhere else! I would rather be a gatekeeper in the house of my God than live the good life in the homes of the wicked.

"For the LORD God is our sun and our shield. He gives us grace and glory. The LORD will withhold no good thing from those who do what is right.

"O LORD of Heaven's Armies, what joy for those who trust in you."

God wants to meet with you in His house. He wants to refresh you. He wants to speak to you. He wants to present Himself to you.

But sloppy habits, with regard to The Meeting, reveal our lack of wonder and lack of fear of God. And it should be no surprise, then, if our faith is also meager and faltering.

Where is the hunger for God's house? Where is the yearning to be in His presence? Where is the excitement and anticipation of meeting with the God of Heaven and His people?

Our "fast-food" mentality urges us to "get The Meeting over with" so we can get on with "the real, more pressing issues of life." This describes a heart at cross purposes with God.

The Meeting is not about my comfort or yours. The Meeting is not about our guests. The Meeting is about one thing above all others: the honor and pleasure of God.

"A single day in your courts is better than a thousand anywhere else!" (Psalm 84:10)

Think about it again: Are you storing up your treasures in Heaven, or building your storehouses on earth?