

I know I have to give you this lecture, but I have to tell you a story. Because this church has played a role in our lives, our family's life, that you all just need to know about. You mentioned that we have a 22-year-old, a 20-year-old, and a 16-year-old. Our 20-year-old is going to get married in January. And my wife and I cannot wrap our heads around that whatsoever. But First Press Columbia had something to do with that. It was back, I think it was in 2019, that we did an Always Ready Youth Apologetics Conference here. We did one just back in March of this year. But the first one we did, and it was actually our first what we called road trip. We had done it at Sanford down in Orlando a couple times. But this was the first time we did it over where the coffee is, that beautiful room. And over half the people here were from North Carolina. About half were South Carolinians, but over half were from North Carolina. And there was, in that group, a young lady. She was brought there by her grandmother. And her grandmother loves Ligonier, is all about Ligonier, and she brought her granddaughter to this Always Ready conference here in Columbia, South Carolina. And her granddaughter's sitting out there, and she says, I want to go to Reformation Bible College, while she was sitting at that conference. And she is the young lady that our son is going to marry on January 4. So, and she's wonderful. So, I am very thankful for the great state of both South Carolina and North Carolina, but very grateful for First Presbyterian Church. We have very important things to talk about. I love this topic, worship. Because when we start to think about worship, what immediately comes to mind? worship wars. That's right. And do you know where the first worship war actually took place? John chapter 4. This woman, this Samaritan woman, was feeling a bit on the ropes here with Christ. His questions were getting a little personal. What you all might say here in the South, he was meddling. And she was more than happy to change the subject. Take a look at it, at John chapter four. We're going to be in quite a few places this morning. We're going to start in John chapter four. After these questions that were getting very personal, she wants to change the subject. Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers, Samaritans, worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship. Ha, gotcha. And in some ways, this is a worship war. It's caught up in the issue of form, isn't it? It's caught up in the physical. It's thinking of worship as if it were contained to a place and a style and a moment. And so the Samaritans have their view of what is an acceptable worship to God. And of course, the Israelites, aided as they are by the Pentateuch, have their view of where worship is acceptable. But what is fascinating is that Jesus steps into this question by challenging the premises, doesn't he? He doesn't get caught up on the horns of the dilemma. It's a false dilemma. And so he undermines it. He wipes out the question by going beyond the question. A woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know. We worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers worship the Father in spirit and in truth. For the Father is seeking such people to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." And isn't it fascinating that this This question posed by this woman to sort of sidestep where this conversation was ultimately going. This theological conundrum that she thought would trip him up somehow, or at least distract him, and they go off into this abstract theological debate. that that question from this Samaritan woman solicits from Jesus the clearest instruction on what proper worship is, and a succinct statement. Two things are necessary here, in spirit and in truth. Now we

know what the truth is a reference to. God is a God of truth. Christ says here that God is spirit, God is truth. A God is a God of truth and he doesn't leave it up to us to determine what the proper worship of him is. He has decreed what is the proper worship of himself. That's the truth part. The spirit part It's kind of interesting. And if you read it, if you consult your handheld device to search, you'll find all sorts of interesting perspectives on this. But they all sort of fall into the category of saying there's something here that is internal, that is very intimate, That is not of merely a formal, external, and we would even use the word here, ritual nature, in terms of getting the right, R-I-T-E, right, as in correct. There's something more about worship because of the relationship that the worshiper has with the one who is worshipped. And so, rather than get caught up in this debate, this worship war, Jesus is essentially telling her and telling us, worship is about knowing who God is. And that's true worship. Now, I just want to use John 4 as an entry point to the text I want to spend a little bit more time in with you. And that text is Hebrews chapter 12. Here we have another very succinct, not at all opaque, rather clear instruction on worship. And in the process, the author of Hebrews, which the author has been doing throughout this entire book, is lodging the argument entirely in the logic of the Old Testament. And there are references abounding here in the end of chapter 12 to the Old Testament. We're going to look back at them. In particular, Exodus 19 is playing a role. And Deuteronomy chapter 4, which is where the very final words of this chapter 12, words in verse 29, are a quote from Deuteronomy 4. So it's very helpful, very fruitful, especially when you're in the book of Hebrews, to go back and get the context of these Old Testament quotes. Because the author of the Hebrews is sort of assuming that the quote then brings to the person who hears the quote or reads the quote the context of the quote. And they already have that background knowledge to understand that context and bring it in to understand the true impact and power of that quote. But let's pick it up at verse 18. And I want you to think about verses 18 to 21, and I want you to think about the key words that are popping up here. For you have not come to what may be touched. A blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest. These are all bad things. A blazing fire is a bad thing. It's out of control. It's destructive. Houses made of straw roof. A blazing fire, fields devastated. Darkness, not a good thing. Gloom, not a good thing. And a tempest. Whipping winds like a hurricane. A tempest. Violent storm. And the sound of a trumpet. And a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. Unbearable words. A word so harsh, a word so hard, you beg they stop. And not only unbearable words, but impossible commands, for they could not endure the order that was given. Even if a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned. Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, I tremble with fear. And I don't think this is the godly fear. I think this is the really falling apart fear. Now, go back to Exodus 19. We know it comes in Exodus 20 in the Ten Commandments. And then eventually we get the tabernacle. But in Exodus 19, we're not there. Here's where we are in Exodus 19, take a look at verse 12. This is Mount Sinai we're talking about, where God is gonna come down and meet with Moses face to face. And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, care not to go up into the mountain, or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot, whether beast or man, he shall not live. When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain. Now what do they see when they get there? Verse 16, on the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on

the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. The Lord came down on Mount Sinai to the top of the mountain, and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. I don't think anyone there ever got over this experience for the rest of their lives. The drama of this event, a mountain itself quaking, and to not even go anywhere near it, not even to touch the edge of it. There's a message here, isn't there? This is a serious God. This is a God who plays for keeps. Now come back to Hebrews. All that is there in verses 18 to 21. This is clearly throwing back to Exodus 19 in this Sinai moment. And then we come to verse 22, and here it is. But, but, you have come to Mount Zion. Now what is Mount Zion? Well, look at all the things here that the author of Hebrews tells us. You've come to Mount Zion. The end of verse 22, he says, to innumerable angels. Actually, we could go up before that. What is Mount Zion but the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. Now we're hearing, right, in spirit and in truth, not this mountain in Samaria and not that mountain in Jerusalem. The heavenly Jerusalem, Mount Zion, is where we meet God and where we worship God. Not only is it Mount Zion, it is innumerable angels. It is the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven. Now, how many firstborns are there in a family? It's just one. It's the whole point. There's second born, as we affectionately call our second born in our house, middle child. You figure, why not? Might as well get used to it. This is the one that's getting married. We'll call him middle child. In heaven, the whole assembly is first borns. Because we're all heirs. We're all the first born. None of us are getting the crumbs from the inheritance and hoping that the firstborn sibling is indeed generous and gracious to us and forgetting all those times that we were mean to them as children. We're all firstborn. But then it gets to it and to God. You're not coming to a mountain where God is encircled in a thick cloud, and all you can know that he's there because of the thunder of his voice. You're coming to God himself. But you've come to God. And then the author says, and to Jesus. And this is how we can come to God, because Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel." This is the theme of the book, the superiority of Christ. The superiority of Christ as a priest, high priest, after the order of Melchizedek, not in the Aaronic line. Superiority of Christ to all the forms of the Old Testament, the superiority of Christ to the various words that have come before, and now Christ is the clear revelation. And this is what we were made for. We were made to dwell on this Mount Zion. We were made to come to Zion. We were made to come to God. We were made to come to Jesus. Now, coming out of this, and notice the contrast, in verses 18 to 21, everything's dark, it's gloomy, it's bad. There's a great word in verse 22, the festal gathering. It's a totally different tone, isn't it? Trumpets can sound for, can be unsettling and disquieting, but trumpets can also shout joy. And so now these trumpets that once were fearful and contributed to all the dissonance, now they're festal. It's feast time. It's joyous. But coming out of this are three implications or three applications, three direct things that are a result of our coming to Mount Zion. And the first one is that we obey. It's right there in verse 25. See to it that you do not refuse him who is speaking. See to it that you do not refuse him that is

speaking. Now, if we take a step back from this, we should say something to the effect of how in the world can you refuse someone who's speaking like this? This God who possesses such enormity, such immenseness, such transcendence, and yet has brought us to Himself. This God who is capable of wiping us out, but has forgiven us through the shed blood of His Son. Who would refuse this God? But there it is, and we do it. We disobey. But the first application of this is you must obey this God. You must obey. The second is there in verse 28. Gratitude. Let us be grateful. Be grateful for what? Be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Now that expression and verse 27 with the idea of the things that are shaken and the things that have been made and sort of shaking out the things that are made so that which remains cannot be shaken. It's a powerful image, we understand what's going on here, but it takes us back to Deuteronomy chapter four. And we know it takes us back to Deuteronomy chapter four, because we get to verse 29, we learn this, for our God is a consuming fire. And that is a direct quote from Deuteronomy chapter four, verse 24. Now, go back to Deuteronomy chapter four. because I think this is going to help us understand this title of my lecture, which was given to me. In spirit and in truth, worship that is pleasing to God. All of us want to be able to check that box. Deuteronomy chapter 4 is about idolatry. And as my heading has it in front of verse 15, idolatry forbidden. Idolatry forbidden. And I'm gonna do a little side note here, and we'll come back to chapter four, but it's fascinating to me that in the Old Testament, the big sins of Israel really come down to three things. They're not obeying the covenant, disobedience. They're not grateful. Go back and look through the Old Testament for how many times God chastises people for their ingratitude. And they're idolatrous, impure. In the end, idolatry is impure worship. Those are the big three sins. Disobedience, ingratitude, idolatry. At the end of Hebrews 12, it's obedience, gratitude, and we haven't gotten there yet, but pure worship. Now, we come to this idolatry section here in Deuteronomy 4, verse 15, and Moses knows, God knows, that all these peoples around, the people groups around them, have these idols. And the temptation is there for Israel, as Paul says in Romans 1, to stop worshiping the creator and instead to worship the creature. And to make likenesses of winged birds. Or, verse 18, things that creep on the ground. Or fish. Do not make these idols. And then down in verse 23, take care, lest you forget the covenant of Lord your God, which he made with you, and make a carved image, the form of anything that the Lord your God has forbidden you, any idol. For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God, a jealous God. Now your question is my question. Why does the author of Hebrews leave off a jealous God? That would just strengthen his argument. His audience knew this text. His audience knew. Now we can go back to Hebrews 12. And if you go back to, if you look through Deuteronomy 4, you'll see it talks about things that are shaken. It talks about physical things that shake. in Deuteronomy chapter four. And the thing that remains is the kingdom of God and this whole idea of shaken and unshakeable, of things that shake out versus the thing that remains is the idea of the pure. And the kingdom of God is pure, no alloys. And the worship that God demands from his people, is pure worship, not slicing off parts of our devotion for the idols. And now we're getting to the heart of it. Because if we reduce worship to the discussion that's often in the worship wars, I think we'll be missing entirely the point of Hebrews chapter 12. And I might even go as far as to say we might be missing entirely the point of worship itself. Now to be sure, there are two things. There's the public, formal gathering of the people of God in worship, and that matters to God. We find in the New Testament that indeed the

authors of the New Testament were Presbyterians, because they tell us that everything has to be done decently and in order. Very Presbyterian. But it's true, isn't it? Decently and in order. What does he tell the Corinthian church? Stop turning church into a carnival where whatever you feel like doing, you do. This is not how we worship God. And then we read the Old Testament, and is there form and beauty and sobriety? Absolutely. So there is something to the public formal gathering worship of the people of God, but that's sort of small w worship. Capital worship is, I'll give you a spoiler alert for those who haven't heard the sermon yet, but we're back to Psalm 27 verse four. Capital W worship is the God-centered life that only wants to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and will never slice off even the smallest percentage for an idol. And that's only possible when we know who God is. And God, it's not that God was a consuming fire. Many people want us to think that. The Old Testament is the consuming fire God. The Old Testament is the God that's clothed in thunder and wrapped in smoke. That's the Old Testament God. The God of the New Testament is love. But the verb here is is in Hebrews 12. Not our God was a consuming fire and glad that's over and done with. Our God is a consuming fire because our God is a jealous God. Now we have verse 28. We already saw the command to be grateful in 28a, but in the second half of this verse, we have the third command. Remember, once we understand that we've come to this Mount Zion, we've come to God, we've come to Jesus, we're part of this assembly of the firstborns, we don't refuse him, which means we obey him. We're not ingrates, but we show gratitude. And then thirdly, let us offer to God acceptable worship. with reverence and awe." So acceptable is defined for us by a holy fear, a right trembling before God, knowing that he is indeed...this is actually in the book of Ecclesiastes, fascinating along the way of the book of Ecclesiastes, there's a mention of worship. And the author Solomon tells us that as you go to the house of the Lord, keep your words few. And here's why. Because you are on earth and God is in heaven. Pretty sound logic. With reverence and awe. Knowing who God is. And then the exclamation point, again, for our God is a consuming fire and he will sniff out idolatry. They will not tolerate it. To worship God in spirit and in truth means, I think, a lot of things. It does mean the personal spiritual relationship that we have with God. It does mean that there's something more than the temporal and the forms. But it also means that we keep ourselves from idols. It also means that if we want to truly worship God, we cannot have room in our lives for anything else to take His place. and to be God in our lives. And, you know, we make fun of the Old Testament peoples, make fun of the Egyptians worshiping frogs. Very strange. But the reality is our idols are perhaps even more ridiculous. And you know what they are. You know what your idols are, I know what my idols are. And they want to snatch our attention and they want to snatch our devotion and they want to be the shiny pretty thing that steals a glance away. And our God is consuming fire. Our God is a jealous God. Well, I know you were probably wanting me to say that to worship that is pleasing to God necessarily has to have a pipe organ. When they mentioned worship was going to be in here, I was wondering to myself, but how are they going to get the pipe organ in here? You just open the windows and it would probably waft over. That's important. I'm not trying to say those things, they do matter. Absolutely it matters that we seek to honor God in our formal worship. But our formal worship stems from our lives as worship. And that's what God wants from us. No, He demands that from us. That we offer Him pleasing worship. in spirit and in truth, with reverence and all." Well, let me pray for us. Our Father and our God, we thank you for your clear word. We see so many arguments and debates over this

worship question, and sadly, we see so many who are flippant in their worship and perhaps far too casual in their worship of you. But we ask that as we think through those things and as we seek to be faithful to your Word and to our confessional understandings, that we would also remember what it means to have you at the center of our lives, that our whole lives be one of worship before you, that we joyfully manifest every Lord's Day as we gather together before you. We pray these things in the name of Christ, whose blood was shed for us to bring us to this holy mountain. Amen.