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The Mega of Megachurches

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About the
Contributor



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This is an excerpt from Chapter 7 of *Your God is Too Glorious: Finding God in the Most Unexpected Places* by Chad Bird (1517 Publishing, 2023).

The push for “more” in worship—more Hollywood-esque drama, more emotional experiences, more sports-arena spectacle—is a direct result of less awareness of what’s really happening as the church gathers. By and large, we’ve forgotten that when the church gathers around the gifts of Jesus, precisely there is heaven on earth. The base of Jacob’s ladder rests in the middle of the church’s sanctuary.

Every gathered family of God, whether they meet in a living room, a mud hut, or a towering cathedral, has one thing in common: more worshipers are present than meets the eye. In the Sunday bulletin in my congregation, there’s a worship attendance number. But it’s always wrong, a gross underestimation. No usher can stand in the balcony and tally up those present in the sanctuary.

Even in mini-churches the mega of megachurches is concealed: the one, holy, Christian, and apostolic church.

When the Spirit summons us from the daily grind of our Monday–Saturday lives to circle round pulpits and altars and baptismal waters, we step into a hidden reality that is more vast than any of us can fathom. Like Jacob, what we suppose is a common place ends up being the very portal of heaven. For where Jesus is, there his whole church is. And where Jesus is, there his angels and archangels are. And where Jesus is, there is the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Where our Lord embraces his bride with mercy and grace, all of heaven crashes the party.

No eye can see, no mind perceive, the throng squeezed within the four walls of any structure housing sinners Jesus has come to serve. Whole companies of cherubim perch atop the rafters, peering down upon those they are called to protect. Tens of thousands of seraphim wing their way, like flocks of birds, round and round the altar. Saints who have left this vale of tears, who have entered paradise with Jesus, accompany him to a grand reunion with those of us who still work and weep our way through life. It's standing room only in every church, whether ten or ten thousand are visible. For invisibly present are the innumerable company of angels, archangels, and all the saints of heaven. Every Sunday is a little taste of what our eyes will finally behold in the resurrection on the last day.

John saw this in Revelation "on the Lord's day" ([Rev. 1:10](#)). He beheld "a door standing open in heaven" (4:1). And inside that door he saw what we don't see but is nevertheless present: thrones, living creatures, saints in white—the Lamb who was slain, worthy to "receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" (5:12).

Isaiah beheld this in Jerusalem when he "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple" ([Isa. 6:1](#)). A choir of six-winged seraphim flew about the sanctuary, chanting, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" (v. 3). The foundations shook. Smoke of incense clouded the house. Isaiah saw through the

earthly veil of the Jerusalem temple to the heavenly reality of what was really happening in the daily worship of the Israelites.

In worship, the church doesn't imitate below what happens above. We participate in it. We all show up late for church. The service has already begun by the time we park our vehicles and walk inside. The praise around the throne of the Lamb is ongoing. And when we leave church, the service continues. For an hour or so,

“ [We] 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 (Heb. 12.22-24). ”

Notice that the preacher in Hebrews does not say we *will* come to this place but we *have* come to this place. We come there every Lord's Day, in congregations large and small, rustic and resplendent, in Siberia and Oklahoma. We all meet at the peak of Mount Zion.

Unawareness of this hidden reality breeds a dissatisfaction with the plain old stuff we see around us. But this plain old stuff is suffused with sanctity. The cup on the altar is full of wine that fermented in the veins of God. The font splashes with water that spilled from the spear-pierced side of Jesus. The pulpit is the open mouth of the Spirit. These plumbers and accountants and first-graders around us have been crowned as kings and queens in the kingdom of God. The minister who's never stepped foot inside a gym, who hasn't a single tattoo, who tells corny jokes—when he preaches the Lord's law and gospel, when he pours baptismal water over the heads of sinners, when he says, “I forgive you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” then he is on par with Moses, Elijah, and Paul, a chosen ambassador of the almighty God.

This plain old stuff, these plain old people, are God's stuff, God's people. And as such they wear the plain garb of the cross on which God made his ultimate revelation. Luther reminds us, "It is not the stones, the construction, and the gorgeous silver and gold that make a church beautiful and holy." [1] What is it, then?

" It is the Word of God and sound preaching. For where the goodness of God is commended to men and hearts are encouraged to put their trust in Him and to call upon God in danger, there is truly a holy church. Whether it is in a dark nook or a bare hill or a barren tree, it is truthfully and correctly called a house of God and a gate of heaven, even though it is without a roof, under the clouds and open sky. [2] "

Wherever we gather with our brothers and sisters in Christ around his Word, be it as unattractive as a basement, as simple as a country chapel, or as remote as a military tent in a war zone, there is Bethel. There is Christ standing beside us. There, in his quiet, slow, unassuming ways, he's pouring abnormal grace into us normal people who are royalty in the kingdom of heaven.

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[1] Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 6–14*, vol. 2 of *Luther's Works*, American edition (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960), 334.

[2] Ibid.

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