I hope everybody had just a wonderful Thanksgiving. Thanks to all of you who participated in the Thanksgiving baskets that we gave away. We were able to give away 1,430 baskets to different homes around the area. (applause) Thank you! Each basket had enough in it to feed up to ten people, so that means that over 14,000 people were able to enjoy a Thanksgiving meal because of you.

Somebody called the church office – and this happens every year – and they just said, “We want to thank whoever’s responsible for this,” and then she told some of her story. She said, “My forty-year-old daughter died last month. My other daughter lives with me and we have nothing, and we didn’t know what we were going to do. Then there was a knock at the door and somebody delivered this basket, and it’s not just a meal – it’s a feast!” And then she said, “We’re going to invite relatives over to share in this bounty of Thanksgiving that has been given to us.” Our receptionist came down the hallway looking for someone to tell, and she had tears in her eyes as she told the story. She said, “I have worked here long enough where I should be used to this by now, but I just can’t get used to it.” I just want to say let’s not ever get used to that. That might have been your basket that was delivered to that family. And I want to always just love being a part of giving people something to remind them when they desperately need reminded that God has not forgotten them and that he loves them still. So thanks! I always think that our church is at its very best between Thanksgiving and Christmas, so let’s just continue to do what we do. Thanks!

A lot of you know that Tom Randall is in the Philippines right now. Not surprisingly, he’s having the time of his life. I’ve talked to him a couple of times. He’s going to be there another week. Please keep praying for him. He can’t wait to get back to tell the stories that have happened while he’s been over there.

It is my privilege to give the final message of this four-part series, All Things New. We’ve had a theme all year, Thy Kingdom Come. We wanted in November to talk about All Things New, what it will be like when the kingdom of God comes in fullness. We started with a new place, that there’s going to be a new heaven and a new earth – and then a new you and new us - and then today, a new worship. I’m calling this Worship Without Limit, what will it be like to relate to God when his kingdom comes in fullness.

I want to start by giving you an image, because I want you to have this image in your mind as we go through this message today. I’m going to show a video. It’s about ninety seconds long. It’s of a guy who was a former bodybuilder. He’s like sixty years old, looks like a tough guy, and he’s trying on glasses that will allow him to see color for the very first time. His whole life he has seen the world in black and white and gray, and he tries on these glasses. I just want you to see how he reacts. Go ahead and run the video. Can you imagine what it
would be like to all of the sudden see the world for the first time the way you were made to see it? That's what worship will be like.

I wanted to get that image in your mind, because I was a kid who grew up in church. When I was growing up, I remember worrying – I had a great fear – that the world would end and I'd have to go to heaven before I'd experience the goodness of this life. Because when people talked about heaven, they used the word worship, and it sounded to me like it was going to be one really long church service – and that did not seem very appealing. I felt like somebody was trying to promise me Disney with all the great rides and I was going to get stuck on It's a Small World After All forever. That was my image.

Let me start with the definition of worship. Worship is the act of enjoying God. The Westminster Shorter Catechism asked the question, “What is the chief end of man?,” and the answer is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. So worship is the act of enjoying God. Your ability to worship is connected to your capacity to enjoy God. Listen to that again, because this is important. Your ability to worship is connected to your capacity to enjoy God.

So let me tell you what the problem with worship now is. Are you ready? This is the problem. Straws. I have three straws here: a tiny straw, a medium straw and a little bit larger straw. I want you to imagine that God is this huge, super thick, delicious milkshake. If you've ever tried to drink a really thick milkshake with a straw – with a tiny straw, you will work really hard and barely get a taste. With this straw it will be a little bit better. With this straw it'll be even better. But still, if it’s a super thick milkshake, it still just comes in little, tiny tastes. That’s the problem with worship.

If you’ve ever wondered why you can come to a service like this and you really only connect with God with a couple of songs or with a particular music style, this is why. It’s that you have a straw, and your straw limits your ability to worship and to enjoy God. It’s always the straw.

I remember being in India a couple years ago at a worship service in a little village in India. They had Indian music, which I don’t really connect to. And then, of course, the words were in an Indian dialect, which I didn’t understand at all. And everybody around me was enjoying God. They were worshiping and I wasn’t. Why? I didn’t have a straw. I couldn’t connect at all. But what I could do – and this is the way I worshiped that day – is I kept looking at the people who were enjoying God. Because sometimes if you’re at a service like this and there’s a song that you can’t really connect to – that doesn’t really match your straw, you can look around until you find somebody who really is connecting. In some ways that can be like you being in a group of people where you didn’t quite hear the joke but everybody else is laughing, and they’re laughing so well and so hard that there’s something in you that you begin to chuckle just because you’re around people who are laughing.

The problem is that most of us don’t ever work on increasing our capacity to worship and to enjoy God. We just say we like what we like, and we walk out of a service going, “You know what, it wasn’t that good. Yeah, that worship, I didn’t get that. I don’t like that kind of music,” instead of really working at it. And this is why that’s important.
This is what we’re going to do next year; I talked to our worship team. Next year I want to have, like once a quarter I want to gather on a Sunday night just to worship – and maybe it’s just for me – but to increase our capacity, to enjoy God. Because the greatest thing you can do here to prepare you to worship God in heaven is to increase your capacity to enjoy him now. But when all things become new and we’re in a new place – the new heaven and new earth – with a new you and the new us, then we will worship without limit. And when we worship without limit, it will impact three things: It will impact the way we relate to the world around us; it will impact the way we relate to each other; it will impact the way we relate to God himself – and all of that will help us enjoy God.

First of all, impact the way we relate to the world around us. This is what the psalmist says in Psalm 19:1-2: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.” It says, “The heavens declare the glory of God. Day after day it pours out speech.”

Sometimes people will tell me, “You know what, I feel most connected to God when I am out in nature.” Then there are people who try to explain to me why they don’t come on Sunday morning. They go, “You know, I just feel I can worship while I’m playing golf.” Doubtful. But there is some truth to being able to connect with God through nature, because there’s something about the pristine beauty and grandeur of nature that draws something out of us, some kind of feeling of awe.

Go back to the guy who was color blind. What filled him with emotion where he was like a little kid who can’t find his pockets? What was that emotion? It was joy! Because he was enjoying something he knew was out there but he had never experienced. How would you even describe color to somebody who had never seen color? How would you describe orange to somebody who’d only seen gray? Whatever way you described it couldn’t do it justice. And when he puts on the glasses, all of the sudden he sees and experiences what he could have seen and experienced his whole life, what he was designed to experience.

You know, scripture says this, that “now we see dimly.” We don’t see clearly. We see dimly. And if the beauty of our nature right now – like the beauty of the snow-capped Rocky Mountains or the Grand Canyon or a Super Nova seen through the Hubble telescope – if that’s seeing dimly, what will it be like when we see what God has created clearly? How much will that fill us with joy?

My wife Karen and I, we go for walks. Whenever we’re walking, we’re always looking for – at least I’m looking for birds of prey. I think that’s what you call them. I look for eagles, for hawks. There’s something majestic about those birds. When I see like a sparrow, I just kind of go – “sparrow”. But I was thinking the other day, if I ever went into my basement and was able to make a sparrow – like a living sparrow with feathers and a circulatory system and digestive system and a way to eat and feed itself and then fly – I would keep it with me, and if I met anybody I would just go, “Hey, I’m Joe. Have you seen my sparrow? Would you look at this thing?” And I would try to describe all that went into it. Why is it that I can look at a
sparrow, shrug my shoulders and go, “It's just a sparrow”? Do you know why? I see dimly. I
don't see the glory of God in a sparrow. It’s not his fault, it’s my fault.

It reminds me of a video I saw some years ago. I’m going to show it to you now. It’s like sixty
seconds. It starts out in space and then it starts clicking – like a zoom – clicks closer and closer
and closer until you get to the level of a single cell and you get to see the complexity of what
goes into everything. Roll this video. (video plays) What would it be like to walk and be able
to zoom in on everything until you saw the dizzying complexity and intellect and beauty of
what God – how long would it take you to walk across a field? How much would you enjoy
God looking up into a starry sky? How much would you enjoy a weekend at the beach or
even just a simple walk in the park? The psalmist says, “The heavens declare the glory of God.
Day after day it pours forth speech.” When all things become new, everything you see will cry
out glory and will fill you with joy and will point you to the one who created it all. When we’re
able to worship without limit, it will change the way we relate to the world around us.

Secondly, it'll change the way we relate to each other. This is 1 John 3:2. John says, “Beloved,
we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that
when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” I used to think
when all things become new the new me would be perfect, like Adam was perfect before sin
entered the world, you would be like Adam or Eve before sin entered the world, but we'll be
more than that. Because what scripture says is that when you take Christ as your Savior, the
Holy Spirit comes inside of you, 2 Corinthians 1. So you will not only be a perfect human
being, you will have the Holy Spirit kind of shining out of you.

That means two things. It means that when I come in contact with you in the new heaven
and the new earth, - do you ever meet somebody for the first time and after you've talked
with them just a few minutes you go, “You know what, you remind me of my best friend in
high school.”? They're not your best friend, but they remind you of your best friend. That’s
the way it will be with each one of us. When I come in contact with you in the new heaven
and the new earth, I’ll be going, “Wait, wait, wait – you remind me of Jesus.” Every single
person you meet will remind you of Jesus.

Not only that, but you have a unique personality. Like no two snowflakes are the same, no
two human beings are exactly the same. So you have this unique personality, almost like a
stained-glass window and Christ being the light that shines out of that window. That means
when I sit with you in the new heaven and new earth I will get an insight, a flavor, of the
infinite, wonderful Savior that we have, a flavor of Jesus I can't get from anybody else. It will
shine through your unique personality so that it will be so kind of intriguing I will have to tear
myself away from you to talk to the next person that will have the same effect. So if you've
ever thought, Listen, if that guy's going to be in heaven, I hope I live in a different neighborhood,
that will never be true. Because everything that repulses you about them and everything
about you that repulses them from you will be gone, and the thing that will bring you
together is this reflection of Jesus.
One of the things we wanted to do to make a little change here at the Hudson Campus is for several years now every time someone comes to Christ during a week from any ministry here at CCC, we put a rose in a vase. So this last week there were a bunch of roses, which is awesome. But we’re going to change it to a stained-glass window. We asked our art department to create a stained-glass window, and they’re going to show it to you on the screen. It’s out in the atrium; there are two of them. Now at the end of every month, we’re going to take all the people who have come to Christ and we’re going to put like a little piece of stained glass – like a leaf onto this tree, in hopes of doing two things: reminding us all that there ought to be times in our lives when people come in contact with us and we remind them of Jesus even now. But the time is coming where everything that you are will reflect something of who Jesus is.

So when we are able to worship without limit, it will not just change the way we relate to the world around us, it will change the way we relate to each other. But best of all, it will change the way we relate to God himself. This is Revelation 7, this is what John writes. He says,

"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”"

I think I have misunderstood that passage my whole life. I don’t think I ever got it, and it frustrates me that I didn’t get it. Because what I saw in my mind when I tried to imagine this, I saw God sitting on a throne like just still, like a big man sitting on a throne. And then the stuff was happening around him and people were falling on their faces to worship him, because that’s what they were supposed to do and that kind of thing. I just think the more I got into it, the more I thought, That’s not the way it’s going to be.

The thing that frustrated me is that Hollywood does a much better job when they do a movie about extraterrestrials than we do when we imagine God – or at least than I do. Because whenever Hollywood does a movie about extraterrestrials, they always put extraterrestrials at a higher level than human beings. That means there are lights and there are special effects. I mean, it’s just awesome the way they look. When I think of God, I think of like a big man sitting on a throne, and I don’t think that’s the way it’s going to be. So I started looking at this passage and thinking, Why would they fall on their faces? What is it that would make them fall down? And then I thought of the color-blind guy, and I thought, Here’s this big, tough bodybuilder and what he can do for the first time is experience something he knew he was created to experience but he had never experienced it – and that was to see color. And it made him begin to cry and to move his arms like he was a little kid and try to find his pockets. You could just sense that joy. What will it be like when you come into the presence of the living God? If that’s what seeing color does to you, what will it be like for you to actually see God?

I think we limit worship to music. That’s what we talk about. We say, “Oh yeah, the first part of our service is worship,” right – because it’s music. But I think if worship is the act of
enjoying God. God gave us five senses - we can see, hear, smell, taste and touch – and all those can give us enjoyment and pleasure. Then there’s a verse in scripture that says, “Taste and see that the Lord is good,” and I started to realize, You know what, the goodness of God has a taste that’s a flavor. I wonder what the goodness of God tastes like. So this is what I started to think, that when they’re around the throne, when the angels cry out, “Glory,” it’s because they see the glory of God – this swirling power, light, majesty – and they not only see glory, they feel glory, they hear glory, they taste glory, they smell the very glory of God, and it is so overwhelming and so intoxicating that they actually fall on their faces. And as soon as they start to recover, then the angel cries out, “Wisdom” or “Goodness.” And then when he says, “Salvation belongs to our God,” I think, What if we can see like that zoom lens where we click in closer and closer until we see all that went in to God saving us, saving you – all the intricacies, all this relentless pursuit of you when you were fleeing from him or didn’t want anything to do with him and he kept coming after you. And all the pain and all the love and all the kindness and all the tenderness that went in to saving you. It will overwhelm you and you will weep when you see the love and experience the love of God. And when they cry out, “Love,” you will see, hear, smell, taste and touch it.

What happened to me as I studied this passage is that worship in heaven went from being the worst thing when I was fifteen to being absolutely the best thing. People ask me sometimes, they’ll go, “Hey, Pastor Joe, will there be pets in heaven? Will there be golf in heaven?” And I think someday we will laugh at what we hoped would be in heaven, because we will actually be able to put on glasses and see for the very first time what we were made to see. We will experience the magnificent, glorious person and presence of the living God, and it will be overwhelming, and it will change the way we experience the world around us. It will change the way we experience each other, and most of all it will change the way we experience him, and we will realize that worship is what we have longed to do our whole lives. God is the epicenter of joy and pleasure. That’s why the psalmist says, “In your presence is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” Every single pleasure, every single taste of joy you’ve ever had was just a drop compared to just being immersed in the wonder of who God is and what he has done for you. The kingdom come. Let’s pray.

Father in heaven, we come to you. Oh man, I want to be a better worshiper. I want to increase my capacity to enjoy you. And I pray for all of us, that you will help us to do that. Help us to do it even now. Help us when we look at the world around us to see with eyes that point us to you. When we experience each other and we see Jesus in another person, that it will make us worship you and enjoy you. Most of all I pray that as we come into your presence - that you invite us into your presence – that we will worship you with all we are, with all we have. Thank you. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.