
Christ as Temple/Christian as Sanctuary

John 2:19-21/Ephesians 2:19-22

Pastor Chad Bresson

Introduction Tonight we continue our series on Christ and the Christian's identity. I was given the task of speaking tonight about the Christian as a dwelling place or sanctuary. Since we enjoyed the cantata this morning, I thought it would not be the wisest thing to consider the Christian as a dwelling place without first considering Christ as the Temple. After all, if Christ is not the fulfillment of the tabernacle and temple in the Old Testament, the church is not itself a temple of the living God. Because the church is only a temple as Christ is a temple.

There will be a series of passages that we will look at tonight, and I plan to use the flow of the canon to help us think about what it means for God to dwell with man. This message is in more of a survey form, than the expositional form that we are used to.

Earlier this year, the Dayton Art Institute hosted an exhibit of ancient Egyptian artifacts. The display included a meticulous replica of the inside of one of the pyramids; I was privileged to visit the exhibit with a Cedarville University professor who knows how to read hieroglyphics. I made a mental note to make sure I take him with me anytime I need to read a pyramid. There were numerous gods and goddesses on display, some artwork and pottery, and tools used by the Egyptians, all of which brought the history of Egypt to life there at the Institute. Among the artifacts was a huge stone gate that had been removed from one of the pyramids. The archway's hieroglyphics gave the name of the deceased, some details of his life, and a dedication to various Egyptian gods and goddesses. This "gate", for the deceased, was entry not only into the afterlife, but also into the present. The gate represented the philosophy and theology of the entire pyramid... it was a portal between this world and the next, with the peak of the pyramid the culmination of stairs leading to heaven.

The Egyptian gate is testimony to man's fascination with finding that elusive gate between what is seen and unseen, between what is bound by time and space and what is not. It is the stuff of science fiction, many times involving a so-called parallel universe. For Michael J. Fox, it was a nuclear powered Delorean that functioned as the gate. For Lucy, Edmond, Peter, and Susan it was a wardrobe. For Alice, it was a rabbit hole. For Colonel Jack O'Neil, it was a Stargate. For Ebenezer Scrooge it was 3 ghosts. For Neo in the Matrix, it was an elaborate machine. For Led Zeppelin, it was a "Stairway".

And, as is the case with the Egyptians, it is also the stuff of the occult. Many of the rituals and incantations of what is called black magic are an attempt to transcend time and space. Mediums "mediate" the window between those who are dead and those who are not. A suicidal cult took its name from its mission: Heaven's Gate, attempted to link up with what they believed to be a spaceship hidden in the Hale-Bopp comet, a ship that would take them through the gateway. The satanic mentor to L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of scientology, accidentally blew himself up presumably attempting to harness the energy he felt necessary to create a gate. The ancient Mesopotamians, Mayans, and Egyptians dotted the landscape with mammoth temples lined with stairs leading to or leading down from the heavens; the

ziggurats, temples and pyramids functioned as gates or bridges between heaven and earth. The most notorious of these occultic construction marvels was the Tower of Babel, the purpose of which was to build a city and a tower “with its top *in the heavens*.” (Genesis 11:4) Babel itself (along with its derivative, Babylon) means “gate of God”. Babel and similar temple-towers¹ were the means by which the gods would descend and have a presence among the people. By placing a tower that gated the earth with the heavens, Babel was a vain attempt to force God to descend to man as a dictated presence on earth.

All of these gateways to heaven have one thing in common, a commonality highlighted by Babel’s futility: the initiative is man’s, it is attempted in rebellion, and it is all about man becoming his own God. The ziggurats, the temples, the black magic, the stone gates, the séances, and the pyramids, are ALL rebellious, shake-your-fist-at-God perversions of the reality revealed to us in the Bible.

The Temple Anticipated

The truth is that God desired from the very beginning to dwell with man, albeit on His terms. Adam and Eve enjoyed God’s presence in the garden, the original sanctuary of God (Ezekiel 28:18). The garden was a sacred space where Creator communed with Creature. Adam fell, irreparably fracturing that communion and violating that sacred space. Adam was removed from God’s presence, and his access to the Holy of Holies was cut off. Yet, the eternal purposes of God in dwelling with man did not change. Throughout the rest of the Bible we find God bridging heaven and earth in his unfolding redemptive revelation of himself.

We find an instance of this in Genesis 28. It is no accident that the story of Jacob’s ladder in the development of scripture is in close proximity to the Tower of Babel. This event is the divine polemic against Babel. God himself builds the bridge.

Let’s read Genesis 28 beginning in verse 10. This is what God’s word proclaims to us: “Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. 11 And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. 12 And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven (notice the similar language to the Babel account). And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! 13 And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac... (VERSE 15) 15 Behold, I am **with you** and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I promised you.” 16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.” 17 And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” 18 So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it

¹ G. K. Beale, “The Temple and the Church’s Mission”, p. 102

up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. 19 He called the name of that place Bethel", or Beth-el, which means the house of God.

This "portal" descending from heaven is not man-made. The heavens open, a stairway is set up, angels ascend and descend the stairway between heaven and earth, and at the top of the ladder, in *heaven*, is God, himself, or most likely, God the Son. Against the backdrop of the black night, God has created his own stairway, his own house, over against the very human and profane "gate of God" designed by the Babel builders. The significance is not lost on Jacob, or Moses the one telling us about it. "How awesome is this place". This is where God dwells with man. This is where he heard God's promise: "I am *with you*. I will keep you. I will not leave you." Jacob recognized that Beth-el is where man experienced the very presence of God himself. And he calls it the house, or dwelling place, of God. Jacob says "this is the gate of heaven".

This was no small deal. Adam had been created to have fellowship and communion with God, yet Adam had been driven from God's presence because of his disobedience. The Creator was at war with the creature. Heaven and earth were cast in a permanent divide. And in those instances when heaven descended to earth, fear and terror marked the response of the fallen creature... this text tell us that Jacob "was afraid". Yet, this event, for Jacob, is grace against the blackness of the night. God promises His presence as a comfort to and support for Jacob. Wherever Jacob was to go, Beth-el, the bridging of heaven and earth by God himself, would also be a reality.

This understanding of God's initiative in bridging the divide between heaven and earth in creating his own sacred space as a presence for his people is later perpetuated in both the movable tabernacle and stationary temple of Israel. Both functioned as God's presence among his people. Turn to Exodus 40. This passage occurs as Moses and Israel have finished building the tabernacle.

Beginning with verse 32. This is what God's word proclaims to us: "When they went into the tent of meeting, and when they approached the altar, they washed, as the Lord commanded Moses. 33 And he erected the court around the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the screen of the gate of the court. So Moses finished the work. 34 Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 35 And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 36 Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. 37 But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. 38 For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys."

This glory-cloud is the shekinah glory from heaven itself. This descent onto the tabernacle and filling the tabernacle with the Lord's glory signifies God's presence among His people. The ark of the covenant functioned as God's footstool on earth (1 Chronicles 28:2), from which God reigned over his people from his throne in heaven. Thus, the ark, the holy of holies, and the tabernacle filled with the shekinah glory was heaven's gate whereby God exer-

cised his dominion over and manifested his presence among his people². The tabernacle was God's sanctuary. It was his house (1 Sam. 1:7); it was his sacred space (Lev. 16:33). The tabernacle was where heaven met earth as God communed with His people (Psalm 132:7). With the tabernacle as the visible center of Israel's existence, all of life, especially the worship at the tabernacle, was what theologians have called "coram deo", before the face of God.

What was true for the tabernacle, became true of its successor, the temple. Turn to 1 Kings where we read about Solomon's dedication of the temple.

Beginning in chapter 8, verse 1. This is what God's word proclaims to us: ¹ Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers' houses of the people of Israel, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion... (VERSE 4) ⁴ And they brought up the ark of the LORD, the tent of meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the tent; the priests and the Levites brought them up. (VERSE 6) ⁶ Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the Most Holy Place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. (VERSE 10) ¹⁰ And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, ¹¹ so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for **the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.** ¹² Then Solomon said, "The LORD has said that he would dwell in thick darkness. ¹³ I have indeed built you an exalted house, a place for you **to dwell in forever.**" (VERSE 22) ²² Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven, ²³ and said, "O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart... (VERSE 27) ²⁷ **"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!** ²⁸ Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O LORD my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you this day, ²⁹ that your eyes may be open night and day toward **this house**, the place of which you have said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. ³⁰ And listen to the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen in heaven **your dwelling place**, and when you hear, forgive. (VERSE 35) ³⁵ "When heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against you, if they pray toward this place and acknowledge your name and turn from their sin, when you afflict them, ³⁶ then **hear in heaven** and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel, when you teach them the good way in which they should walk, and grant rain upon your land, which you have given to your people as an inheritance. (VERSE 41) ⁴¹ "Likewise, when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a far country for your name's sake ⁴² (for they shall hear of your great name and your mighty hand, and of your outstretched arm), when he comes and

² G. K. Beale, "The Temple and the Church's Mission", p. 36

prays toward **this house**,⁴³ **hear in heaven your dwelling place** and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and that they may know that this house that I have built is called by your name. (VERSE 54)⁵⁴ Now as Solomon finished offering all this prayer and plea to the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, where he had knelt with hands outstretched toward heaven. (VERSE 1, CHAPTER 9)¹ As soon as Solomon had finished building the house of the LORD and the king's house and all that Solomon desired to build,² the LORD appeared to Solomon a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon.³ And the LORD said to him, "I have heard your prayer and your plea, which you have made before me. I have consecrated this house that you have built, by putting my name there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time."

This prayer of dedication follows the construction of the temple. And just as happened with the tabernacle, as they finish, the very same glory-cloud that descended from heaven over and into the tabernacle, descends and fills up the temple. God's shekinah glory takes its residence in the temple, representing God's presence with and among His people.

Notice the rhythm of Solomon's prayer of dedication: house-heaven, house-heaven, house-heaven. Pray towards this house; hear from heaven. Pray towards this house; hear from heaven. Solomon fully understands that as the shekinah glory fills the temple, so much so that no one can minister, the God of heaven who cannot be contained has indeed taken up residence among his people. His dwelling place is both heaven and earth in the temple. To pray towards this house is to pray towards heaven. To be "in" this house is to be "in" heaven on earth. The temple, with its holy of holies and the ark as a footstool, functioned as his throne room from which God ruled, redeemed, and communed with his people. The temple was the gateway to heaven, where heaven and earth intersect, even as had been the case in the garden, with Jacob's ladder, and with the tabernacle. Heaven and earth meet in one place, where God dwells among his people. You can begin to see where this is headed.

But the tabernacle and temple are not permanent dwelling places for God. Solomon recognizes this when he asks "what house can contain God?" God's presence is tied to his people's obedience. And ultimately, they fail the test. Just as Adam and Eve were sent away and prohibited from God's presence with a flaming sword, Israel is deported to Babylon from the presence of the Lord. Ezekiel watches in horror (Ezekiel 10:18-19, 11:22-23) as God's glory departs from the temple, never to return. As the glory cloud heads out of the city of Jerusalem ("toward the east"...Matthew picks up on this in describing wise men and a shekinah star "from the east"), God's judgment is final. When that glory cloud takes flight from the temple, so too does all of Israel's hopes and dreams for the land flowing with milk and honey, that paradise of God's presence on earth. What had been the identity of the nation, God's dwelling among his people in visible blessing, and God's name in residence in the temple, is GONE. What an empty, terrible feeling that must have been. And even when the exiles return to build the temple, what becomes apparent and obvious to the Jews, is that once dedicated, God's glory does not return. The glory-cloud does not descend. It does not come back to the temple where it once resided. No longer is the temple the visible gateway to heaven. While God is with his people, God's visible presence is no longer felt in the house. The temple was an empty shell of what it had been when it had been the house for God's shekinah glory.

Turn to Ezekiel 37. Here is the story of Ezekiel and the dry bones that come to life. God says he is going to breathe life into dry and dead Israel.

This is what God's word proclaims to us. Verse 14 says, "I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD." (VERSE 21) I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all around, and bring them to their own land. ²² And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. And one king shall be king over them all, and they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms. ²³ They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. But I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. ²⁴ "My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes. ²⁵ They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children shall dwell there forever, and David my servant shall be their prince forever. ²⁶ I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and **will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore.** ²⁷ **My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.** ²⁸ Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when **my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.**"

In the wake of the hopelessness and judgment from God's departure from the temple, Ezekiel points forward to something bigger and better coming. There is an anticipation of another eternal dwelling of God with his people, which Ezekiel outlines in later chapters. The language here leaves no doubt that what is coming will dwarf anything they have ever seen. In other words, the tabernacle and the temple, as great as they were, as glorious as they were, as transcendent as they were, were just shadows of something better.

The Temple Revealed

And that brings us to a dark, Bethlehem field where shepherds watched their flocks. Things indeed were dark in Israel. For almost 600 years, the glory of God represented by the glory-cloud had been absent from Israel. God's people suffered not only from Rome's oppressive hand, but also from religious leaders who were fleecing the flock. The flock itself worshiped God with their lips, yet their hearts were far from him. Against the backdrop of the darkest night, God intervenes in time and space. There's the angel, with the "glory of the Lord" shining all around the shepherds. After 600 long years, the shekinah glory has returned to Israel, heralded by angel and by star. And this time, the glory will never leave.

Christ: The New Tabernacle – John 1:9-18

John picks up on this glory theme in John 1.

Turn to John 1 beginning with verse 9: "⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world...(VERSE 14) ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt

among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

The Word “dwelt” or the Word “tabernacled” among us and we have seen his “glory”. The word for dwell means literally “to pitch one’s tent”. John here presents Christ as the new tabernacle. The glory that had departed from the temple has returned. The glory is here because the new tabernacle is here. No longer is God’s visible presence confined to the holy of holies. No longer does God dwell with men in a tent. No longer is there the possibility that the glory cloud will be removed from God’s people. The incarnation of the Word is itself the new tabernacle of God in which God’s glory resides. The Pre-existent WORD has descended from heaven in glory to, in the words of Ezekiel, “make his sanctuary among his people forevermore.” In Jesus Christ, heaven has intruded itself upon earth. The Word incarnate has become a living temple “made without hands” among those who have received him and have become the children of God. In Christ, the new tabernacle, the shekinah glory of God is revealed. In Christ, God’s people have a new access to the holy of holies and the immediate presence of God not previously possible.

Christ: The New Bethel – John 1:48-51

And as if to reiterate that point, John includes Christ’s conversation with Nathaniel.

Verse 48 of the same chapter: “⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” ⁴⁹ Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” ⁵⁰ Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” ⁵¹ And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

Do you know who it is that saw you under the fig tree, Nathaniel? Nathaniel is in the presence of the very Lord of the Ladder. Moses tells us that when Jacob saw the ladder descending from heaven with angels ascending and descending that the LORD stood over the ladder. Now, Christ tells Nathaniel that Jehovah himself is that ladder and has descended to earth. Just as the tabernacle was temporary, so too was the gateway to heaven at Beth-el. Beth-el not only pointed to the tabernacle, but it also pointed to Christ. Beth-el, and the subsequent tabernacle and temple, have been eclipsed by a new and permanent portal. Heaven meets earth in Jesus Christ. It is Christ who is the primary link between the throne of God in heaven and his footstool on earth. The heavens have opened, God himself has descended, and God dwells with men in the person of Jesus Christ. This stairway to heaven is personal. This gateway to heaven placing His people in God’s presence has flesh and blood. This portal to the throne room of God doesn’t come bringing Moses’ law, but “grace and truth”. This stairway is the Son of Man, the last Adam who communes with God in His presence as the first Adam failed to do. This bridge between heaven and earth is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Christ: The New Temple – John 2:18-21

Yet, there is more that Christ has to say. John is setting us up to see something else. John continues this theme, even as Christ develops it.

In the very next chapter, beginning with verse 13: ¹³ The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. ¹⁵ And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸ So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body. ²² When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Not only is Christ the new tabernacle, and not only is Christ the new Beth-el, but he is the new temple. Yet this new temple arrives in a very unexpected form. What does the Word made flesh tabernacling among us do when he arrives at the temple? Christ, the new tabernacle, clears the temple of its pollution and in doing so, declares himself to be the new temple. But this temple doesn't look anything like the old temple.

The old temple was majestic and was filled with the visible glory-cloud. This new temple comes in the frailty of humanity. And the shekinah glory is hidden to those who do not believe. But... the glory *is* there. The shekinah glory is manifested through zeal for God's house, an inner fire that will eventually consume Christ on the cross, or as Psalm 69 says it, zeal for God's house will consume the Word made flesh even as he bears in his own body the reproach of those who reproach God. The Jews want a sign. Christ, in declaring himself to be the new temple of Israel, says "I AM the sign". Already John has spoken of Christ's glory in relation to his actions. Just as turning water into wine had manifest the shekinah glory of the new tabernacle (John 2:11), so too does the cleansing of the temple. But they don't see it. They want to know where Christ gets His authority. And His answer is in the new temple manifested in his death and resurrection. Through Christ's reproach in death and His glory in resurrection the new, permanent temple is built.

Israel's identity as well as her public worship were wrapped up in the temple. Christ clears the old temple to resurrect a new temple where heaven meets earth, where true worship takes place. It is in Christ that Israel is to find its identity. Yet Israel fails to recognize this. The cleansing of the temple foreshadows the coming destruction of the entire temple in judgment. Israel's temple, because of her unbelief, had become no better than Babel. In Christ's cleansing, the Jewish leaders who are looking for a sign are shown that there is coming a day when God will tear down what had become to them an idol and replace it with true worship in a new sanctuary.

In Christ's death and resurrection, Christ's body becomes the locus of all true worship. Christ's body is the temple in which the blazing glory of God is on display. This is why he can say just a couple of chapters later to the woman at the well, there is a day coming when those who truly worship will worship in spirit and in truth. The temple will no longer be located in Jerusalem, because the new temple is located in a Person. One doesn't have to go

to a temple where the shekinah glory-cloud resides in order to be near God or hear from God. One draws near to God as one draws near to Christ, the revelation of God's glory. It is in the cross and it is in the resurrection that access to the holy of holies will be opened once for all.

Yes, the old temple was majestic and glorious. But that temple, because it was made with hands, merely pointed forward to one whose majesty and glory is grander and greater than Solomon's temple. It is in Christ, the one who came tabernacling among his people, the link between heaven and earth, that God's glory is manifest both in heaven and on earth.

The Temple Established

What are the implications, then, for Christ's church? Paul, Stephen (in Acts), Peter, the writer of Hebrews, and John all pick up on the significance of Christ's statement to the religious leaders here in John 2. It becomes a point of contention at Stephen's trial because the Jews didn't forget what Christ said (Acts 6:13). In fact, one of the reasons the guards were placed outside of the tomb is because the Pharisees were well aware that Christ had planned to rebuild the temple in 3 days. There is much significance in Christ's words and the implications are huge for the church.

What does it mean for us that Christ is the new temple of God, the fulfillment of the temple shadows of the Old Testament? Christ's death and resurrection have forever linked heaven with earth in the Person of Jesus Christ. True worship has been established, centered on Christ and His work on behalf of his people. The physical manifestation of God's glory is located again in the heavens where Christ has been exalted and enthroned. Yet, there is a residual of heaven on earth as the Word tabernacles among his people. Turn first to 1 Corinthians 3:10. By the time Paul writes this letter to the Corinthians, another significant event in the cosmos has already occurred. In a scene reminiscent of the Old Testament tabernacle and temple, the glory-cloud shows up again. The glory-cloud that fell on and filled those Old Testament worship centers has fallen on the church in the upper room in tongues of fire and a rushing wind. Just as the glory-cloud in the tabernacle and temple had represented God's presence on earth, so now the church, as it is united to Christ the new temple, now visibly represents God's presence on earth.

So that Paul can say in 1 Corinthians 3:9 "...we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—¹³ each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward.¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.¹⁶ Do you not know that you are God's temple and that **God's Spirit dwells** in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple."

The context for this passage is the role of leadership in the church. Paul describes the task of the elders in the church as those who are engaged in keeping God's field or garden and building God's building (it's hard to ignore the similarities of the link here between garden and building and between the new garden of God and new temple in Rev. 21-22). But this isn't just any building. This "building" in verse 9 Paul identifies as "God's temple" in verse 16. Wheaton professor G. K. Beale notes that "the only other place in Scripture where a foundation of a building is laid and gold and silver and precious stones are 'built' upon the foundation is Solomon's temple."³ The foundation of this temple is none other than Jesus Christ himself. The true temple of God that has manifested His glory is the foundation of a visible temple on earth, His church. These thoughts of Christ as the temple and the church as the temple are interconnected. Just as Christ, the Word made flesh, tabernacled among his people, so now God the Holy Spirit dwells *in* Christ's church.

As the church leaders proclaim Christ crucified rather than worldly wisdom, they are involved in building on Christ's foundation a temple made without hands. As the church feeds on Christ, the church *is* the new sanctuary where heaven and earth meet. It is in the church, as it hears and believes Christ crucified, that God's people draw near to and have access to the holy of holies. It is in the church collectively gathered as an assembly as Christ's body that God's presence is manifested on earth. We are being built into a spiritual house, a community of believers who form the temple of God on earth. It is here, as the Word builds into our lives upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, that we are the sanctuary of God where the glory of heaven intrudes into time and space on earth.

The church at Corinth is not the only recipient of Paul's teaching on the visible temple of God in the new covenant.

Turn to Ephesians 2. Beginning with verse 13: ¹³But now in Christ Jesus **you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.** (this "far off" and "near" language is temple language... Anytime we see these words used like this we need to begin thinking that the temple or tabernacle is probably being referenced...to be brought near is to be brought to the holy of holies and the ark of the covenant's mercy seat)¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh **the dividing wall of hostility** ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were **far off** and peace to those who **were near.** (Paul is now using temple language in reference to Jews and Gentiles; Jews had access to God because they had the tabernacle and temple. Gentiles were on the outside of the covenant, the temple, and God's promises and blessings looking in)¹⁸ For through him we both have **access** (again a temple reference to the access to God via the holy of holies and the ark of the covenant that was denied to His people except for once a year; when we see these words "near" and "far" and "access", our thoughts should turn to the temple and tabernacle. This is especially true in the book of Hebrews) in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the

³ G. K. Beale, "The Temple and the Church's Mission", p. 247

saints and **members of the household of God**,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,²¹ in whom the whole **structure**, being joined together, grows into a **holy temple** in the Lord.²² In him you also are being built together into a **dwelling place** for God by the Spirit.

And in chapter 3 Paul says this in verse 14: ¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that **Christ may dwell** (may tabernacle) in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is **the breadth and length and height and depth**, (given the context, think temple dimensions)¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (and again, “filled” with all the “fullness” is temple language. This is exactly what the glory-cloud did to the tabernacle and the temple. It filled the tabernacle and temple. It is as Christ dwells in our hearts and we know His love that we, like the tabernacle and temple, are filled with that glory-cloud of God’s fullness).

Paul is not done with allusions to the temple in Ephesians, but we don’t have time to pursue them. But, in the next chapter (Eph. 4), Paul is going to move from speaking about the church as a temple to the church as a body, continuing the theme of John 2 in which Christ says his body is the new temple. Already he has made allusion to this in chapter 2... the church has been reconciled to God in Christ’s body at the cross (vs. 16), and it is through Christ’s body, the new temple, that peace has been made between God and man.

One of the first things we see in this passage is that **no longer are Gentiles going to be shut out of temple worship**. Not only will Gentiles have the same access to God’s presence on earth, Gentiles with Jews will manifest that presence as the temple of God on earth.

Secondly, we find that **those who were formerly children of wrath but are now “in Christ” are here and now identified as a temple**. To be “blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3) is to be “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God”. This household of God is another reference to the temple... the old temple was God’s “house”. It is in Christ, the new temple of God, that the “whole structure” of the church “grows into a holy temple”.

Thirdly, **to be a temple is to have unprecedented access to the Father**. What was denied to Israel by a veil is now established in the corporate body. Again, heaven and earth – bridged by Christ himself, are connected in a unified Jew and Gentile church. Once again we have echoes of Ezekiel 37 (as well as Isaiah 56-57). Paul isn’t simply borrowing a metaphor to apply to the church. He is exegeting the Old Testament. The promise of God in Ezekiel 37 has been fulfilled in Christ and this fulfillment includes the church as it is in Christ:

²² And I will make them **one nation** in the land, on the mountains of Israel. And **one king** shall be king over them all, and they shall be no longer two nations, and no **longer divided into two kingdoms**... (now Ezekiel is talking about the northern and southern kingdoms. Paul takes that language of unity and extends it further; not only is this “one nation” about all of Israel, but it is inclusive of the Gentiles).

(VERSE 26) ²⁶ I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and **will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore.** ²⁷ **My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.** ²⁸ Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when **my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.**”

This is life in the new creation. **The Jew is no longer separated from Gentile.** Both are no longer denied access to the holy of holies and the Jehovah of Israel. Both Jew and Gentile have access to the Father. There is now a covenant of peace. Both Jew and Gentile worship in God’s temple together because both are being built up **as** God’s temple on earth. God has set “his sanctuary” in our midst. His dwelling place is with us in Christ through the Spirit. Or as Paul says in Ephesians 2 and 3, to be “in Christ” is to be part of that gateway between heaven and earth where His name resides, stamped on people who bear his image. God, as he promised in Isaiah 56 and 57, has brought the foreigner and the outcast into His house of prayer, where he has given them His name. It is this building up of the temple in which the elders and the church are engaged.

Fourthly, notice that **the language of temple building in Ephesians 2 and 3 is **present**, not past, and not future.** Jew and Gentile are being joined together and built together into a dwelling place for God, with Christ, the new temple as the chief cornerstone. This temple building, which was begun at the cross and resurrection, continues to expand the perimeters of the new sanctuary of God. As we grow together in Christ, the walls of the temple expand, growing the presence of God wherever the church grows. As God’s temple, we manifest his presence and glory on earth. This expansion will continue until the temple building is completed in the last day.

Fifthly, it is **in the church that God comes to commune with his people.** This is a communion that can be found nowhere else. It is the community of believers that is God’s sacred space, the temple of God, being built up on Christ the chief cornerstone. Through the faith of the corporate body of believers, Christ dwells in His church so that the glory of God may fill it (Eph. 3:19). Christ, through his Spirit, resides in His people as we affirm in faith what God has done for us in Christ. It is here, as a church-temple connected to the temple in heaven, that we, every time we meet, and just like Isaiah, are coram deo, before the face of God. When we come here to worship, we are in the presence of God because we are a temple. This assembly is where heaven meets earth.

The Temple Completed

Yet, even the temple where Christ currently dwells with his people is imperfect. The sanctuary linking heaven and earth in Christ’s church has been inaugurated, but it has not been completed. There will come a day, when this building up of the sanctuary of God will be complete.

Revelation 21 says this in verse 1: ¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“Behold, **the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.** ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (VERSE 22) ²² **And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.** ²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵ and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷ But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

Can you hear Ezekiel 37? “My dwelling place shall be with them and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” Here at the end of time we find the temple in its finality. In the new heavens and new earth there will be no temple because the temple will be everywhere, because the temple is Christ himself. The communion between Creator and Creation that was begun in the garden will be complete. All that the garden, Jacob’s ladder, the tabernacle, and the temple pointed to has its endpoint in This Lamb, who is the temple of the new heaven and new earth. The goal of the original garden for God’s presence to fill the entire earth will be realized. God’s redemptive plan for His creation is fully and finally revealed in Christ. There’s no need for a physical temple made by hands because Christ, who has already declared himself to be the temple in his death and resurrection, is the center of the new heavens and new earth as the temple made without hands.

Here in Revelation 21 the dwelling place, the sanctuary, the temple of God is with man and it fills the entire new heavens and new earth. The sacred space of the immediate, special presence of God will encompass the entire earth, and will be for all the nations, Jew and Gentile. The building of the new temple has come to its completion. Christ, the incarnate dwelling place of God will dwell with his redeemed people in constant and immediate fellowship forever.

Lessons

As we consider the incarnation at this time of year, **let us remember that the child in the manger is the eternal Word who came to tabernacle among his people.** It is through Christ, the incarnate presence of God and his glory, that we have communion with God. The manger is only the beginning. The glory that shone around the shepherds (and led the wise men) not only points to the baby, but points forward to Christ’s exaltation through his death and resurrection. Christ, the last Adam, bridged heaven and earth on our behalf. Christ now is high and lifted up and his train fills the temple. Because the glory-cloud has descended on His people at Pentecost, there is never a day never an hour and never a second that Christ is not among His people. Is this what we see when we see the baby in the manger?

The well known 1980’s philosopher Huey Lewis spoke for all of mankind when he sang “all I want from tomorrow is to get it better than today. Step by step, one by one, higher and

higher, step by step, rung by rung, I'm climbing Jacob's ladder. It would be very easy to pick apart the blatant humanism of that worldview. Yet it is precisely this kind of human wisdom that Paul is warning against in 1 Corinthians 3. We must be careful not to dupe ourselves into thinking that we can manufacture ministry with human wisdom. To do so is to believe that we can create our own gateway to heaven. At some point, God himself will come down and he will burn down Babel's wood, hay, and stubble. All of our life and ministry is dependent on God's descent to us in Christ. Christ is our ladder. Christ is our foundation for ministry. **This temple of God's people is not our building.** It is God's.

Gentiles are no longer on the outside looking in, in this new temple of God. Gentiles were only allowed as far as the temple courtyard. There was a day, Paul says in Ephesians 3, when Gentiles were without hope. The cross not only bridges heaven and earth, but it bridges Jew and Gentile, and it bridges the Gentile with God. The veil or dividing wall not only has been torn down between man and the mercy seat, but also between Jew and Gentile. Christ's reconciliation has resulted in both access and sanctuary. Gentiles now enjoy privileges heretofore unheard of. Christ's reconciliation has brought near the Gentile who afar off and has placed the Gentile into this new sanctuary of God. We Gentiles now share in an inheritance that once was not ours; we now worship in a temple that was once not accessible because of the reconciliation and redemption worked by Christ for us. Christ not only created access between heaven and earth, he has become the cornerstone for this Jew and Gentile sanctuary that is his presence on earth.

The church is the sanctuary of God, even as we await the temple of the new heavens and new earth. From time to time, usually listening to Christian radio, I'll hear a line of reasoning about the church and worship that goes something like this: Christ said in John 4 that the location of true worship was no longer going to be centered in Jerusalem. Therefore, location is no longer important when it comes to worship. And along those same lines, those of us who grew up in a Baptist tradition know about the aversion to calling the auditorium where we meet for worship a "sanctuary". While it is true that the locus or location of worship is no longer a temple made with hands in Jerusalem or a room in a building made of brick and mortar, location is still everything. This building is not the sanctuary of God; God's people are the sanctuary of God. Where God's people are, it is there that Christ has chosen to dwell. It is here that Christ meets His people.

And if the writer of Hebrews has this same thought in mind behind Hebrews 10 and Hebrews 12 (and I think he does), **when we gather as God's people, we are coram deo, or before the face of God, in our corporate worship.** It is here that God meets us in sacred space. It is here, when we gather together, that we are ushered into heaven. When we worship together, when we one another each other, when we pray for each other in fulfilling our priestly responsibilities, and when the Word is proclaimed both in preaching and the Lord's table, *heaven and earth meet*. All of our corporate church activities in the assembly are in a unique way, in God's very presence. This is where Christ meets His people. This church building is not a temple; but this corporate body most certainly is, according to 1 Corinthians 3, Ephesians 2, 2 Corinthians 6, and 1 Peter 2.

And yes, all of life is worship. But these passages are telling us that there is a corporate spiritual reality in the assembled meeting that is *different* than when we are by ourselves and away from the gathered temple. When we gather together we come with the expectation

that in this sacred space we will be in heaven's presence. This raises the question as to why anyone who claims to be among God's people would neglect the meeting together. With no apologies to the hideous demonic cult, when Christ's people gather together here this is heaven's gate! Why? Because the church is united to the true Temple in the heavenlies.

This is why the proclamation of the Word is so important to our meeting together. Paul tells us that this sanctuary of God's people is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The foundation is not only the work of the apostles in the beginning days of the church, but Paul's inclusion of "prophets" means that the foundation of this temple is God's Word. Paul can say that God's Word is our foundation because THE WORD, Christ, is our cornerstone. We, collectively and corporately are growing up into a temple where God, in his providence, has chosen to take up residence. It is here that Christ *dwells*, even as we feed on Him through His Word.

This sanctuary is merely a shadow of what is to come. Christ's glory dwells in his people in this tent of suffering and hardship. The glory here on earth is still hidden in jars of clay. There will come a day when this sanctuary of God's people will experience the full reality of the Lamb who is the temple of God in the New Jerusalem. What we have here in heaven meeting earth is just a taste of what it will be like when heaven and earth are collapsed into one blessed temple before the face of God. There will be no light because the shekinah glory that radiates from the Light of the World and the temple that covers the world will be our light. We will hear him say, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God." All of what was foreshadowed in the tabernacle and temple will consummate in the Word who came and dwelt among us. The communion that was given in the garden will be far surpassed by the communion in the new temple where God will dwell with and commune with his people forever.

Response

Let us repent of being too often like the Jews of John 2, who were so fixated on what they could see, the physical temple with its earthly power and prestige, that they missed the glory of Christ, the new temple. And let us remember John's words in light of what we have heard: But as many as received the Word who was made flesh and came to dwell among us, to us he gave the power to become children of God. These have been written, John tells us, that we might believe and continue to believe that Christ is the temple that was raised in 3 days. It is this temple that gives us life. It is in this Temple incarnate that God has chosen to place His name and dwell among his people. He has included us in this glorious plan to commune with his people. Let us continue to build each other up into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. And let us continue to draw near in faith to Christ who dwells among us, coming boldly to the holy of holies in confidence with full access. We are His sanctuary, even as we are identified with Christ, the word made flesh who came to dwell among us.⁴

⁴ Sources for this sermon included G.K. Beale, "The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling place of God"; T. Desmond Alexander & Simon Gathercole, "Heaven on Earth: The Temple in Biblical Theology"; Herman Ridderbos, "Paul: An Outline of His Theology"; Andreas Kostenberger, "John"; Andrew T. Lincoln, "Ephesians"