

“God With Us”: Jesus, the Temple & the Church

Matt. 1:23 ~ John 1:1,14

Behold, the virgin shall conceive & bear a son, & they shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us). (Mt. 1:23)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... 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. (Jn. 1:1,14)

INTRO

By way of introduction, I want us to put ourselves in Abram’s shoes. You remember Abram, later called “Father Abraham”, who had many sons (“and you are one of them, and so am I...”). Abram is going about life in the same way we all do, when all of a sudden he encounters Jehovah God, God Almighty. This encounter changes his life, he had never known about the one true God before. Now he loves God and wants to serve Him. Abram arrives at God’s special land prepared for him and his descendants. He then erects a series of altars – places where he can commune with and worship God. God gives many promises to Abraham, and chief among them is the one found in Gen. 17:7. *(I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.)*

Later, this promise would be repeated to Moses in Exodus 6:7. *(I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.)* And when God introduced the Tabernacle to the Israelites, it was to fulfill God’s intention as stated in Ex. 29:45 *(I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God)*. Lev. 26:11-12 extends this promise out to Israel’s future: *(I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.)*

God kept His promise to dwell with His people, as King David indicates in 2 Sam. 7:24 *(And you established for yourself your people Israel to be your people forever. And you, O LORD, became their God.)* And when Israel found herself in captivity, God renewed this promise to her in giving the new covenant. Jeremiah 31:33 *(But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.)* and Ezekiel 37:27 *(My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.)*

We find this promise that God would dwell with His people, that they would be God’s people, and God would be their God, no less than 28 times in the Old Testament, from Genesis all the way to Zechariah! And what a promise that is, God dwelling with man. Only a beautiful Temple with highly regulated rules and sacred spaces, with sacrifices and ritual offerings, only this seems appropriate for “housing” a deity.

But, Solomon was never wiser than when he declared, in 1 Kings 8:27, *(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!)* We know the Temple was God containing Himself for man’s benefit.

Against this backdrop of God’s continual Old Testament promise that He would be God for His people and He would dwell with them, in this light, we should be just blown away when we come to read the text for our message today. John 1:14: *the Word became flesh and DWELT among us!* Literally, “tabernacle” among us (the same Greek word used in many of the verses I just quoted). And we will see later, that the very promise that God would be our God, and we His people is given to us, the church, in

2 Cor. 6:16, and then is ultimately realized in Revelation 21:3. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

- I. Jesus Embodies the Temple
- II. The Church is Being Built Up into a Temple
- III. Our Obligations as a "Company of Priests"

I. Jesus Embodies the Temple

- A. Jesus was **full of God's Spirit** – the Shekinah Glory that inhabited the Tabernacle and Temple.
- B. Jesus **compared the Temple of His day to His body** -Jn. 2:19-21 READ, Mk. 14:58 (*We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.*)
- C. Jesus told the Woman at the well in John 4: (*the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father... the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.*)
- D. Jesus had access to "**Living Water**", just as the river of life flows from the heavenly city, it was prophesied in Ezek. 47:1-12, Joel 3:18, and Zech. 14:8 that the ultimate, end-times Temple would have a life-giving river flow from it. See Jesus words in this light in John 7:37-39 (*If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive...*)
- E. When Jesus died, the **temple veil** was torn in two (Mark 15:38), and Heb. 10:20 says Jesus' body is the "veil" that was torn to allow access to God's presence.
- F. Jesus also promised that **He would never leave us**, the presence of God that was enjoyed in the holiest precincts of the Temple would remain with us forever! (*Mt. 28:20 "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Mt. 18:20 "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." Jn. 14:23 "Jesus answered him, 'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'" Jn. 14:17 "the Spirit of truth... dwells with you and will be in you"*)
- G. So in summary, Jesus gave us a **greater realization of God's presence than the Temple ever did**. Jesus superseded the Temple and was more glorious than the Temple. And now that Jesus is here, we don't need a Temple, He is our mediator, and we have the Spirit of Jesus living inside of us.

II. The Church is Being Built Up into a Temple

- A. Not only is Jesus the Temple. We as believers are "being built up" into a Temple for God. Turn to **1 Pet. 2:4-10**.
 - 1) Christ is the cornerstone, and we are "living stones" built upon him, the "Living Stone".
 - 2) We are a spiritual house.
 - 3) We are a holy priesthood (see also 2:9, and Ex. 19:5-6/Rev. 1:6/Rev. 5:10)
 - 4) We offer spiritual sacrifices.
- B. Turn also to **Eph. 2:18-22**.
 - 1) The passage is speaking of Jews and Gentiles being one in Christ.
 - 2) We are part of the "household of God"
 - 3) We are being built again, on the foundation of apostles + prophets, with Christ the cornerstone.
 - 4) It is a structure, joined together, that grows into a HOLY TEMPLE in the Lord.
 - 5) We are built together into a DWELLING PLACE for God, by the Spirit.

C. Finally turn to **2 Cor. 6:14-7:1**.

- 1) Here we see again how we are privileged to share in those great promises we read earlier. God will make his DWELLING PLACE among us.
- 2) God will be our God, and we his people.
- 3) We will be sons and daughters of God.
- 4) All this is in line with us being “the temple of God” in vs. 16.

III. Our Obligations as a “Company of Priests”

A. A “Company of Priests”.

- 1) I know we’ve just barely sketched this theme so far, but think of it a moment. You and I, we all are priests.
- 2) We have an incredibly important and significant job – We are serving in God’s temple, and we are actually being built up as part of it!
- 3) Like the saints of old felt privileged when they ascended the Temple steps and were in the courts of praise, we have an even more mind-numbing position as being the very habitation of God’s Spirit, corporately and individually!
- 4) We are a company of priests on a mission for Christ’s Kingdom. We are extending the presence of God, the knowledge of God, and ultimately the glory of God to the ends of the earth.
- 5) We are imaging God, whether we want to or not, when people want to find God or to see God, they have to look at us. We’re His Temple, and that’s where people will find God.

B. This brings sober **Obligations** on our part. (But “obligations” is probably the wrong word, we should say “privileges”!)

- 1) **Worship** – Heb. 12:28-29 (*Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.*
***remember Nadab, Abihu*)
- 2) **Sacrifice**
 - singing of praise (Heb. 13:15)
 - doing good and sharing our possessions (Heb. 13:16, Micah 6:6-8)
 - giving of gifts to enable spread of the gospel (Phil. 4:18)
 - confession of sin, penitence of heart (Ps. 51:17)
 - steadfast love/covenant loyalty & a knowledge of God (Hos. 6:6)
 - offering our very bodies to God for spiritual service (Rom. 12:1)
- 3) **Prayer (Incense)** (*Ps. 141:2 “Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!” Rev. 5:8 “the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”*)
- 4) **Witness**
 - Church is pictured by lampstands in Revelation, spreading God’s light abroad (see Matt. 5:14-16, too).
 - Paul saw his work of taking the Gospel to the Gentiles as a sacrificial service too (*Rom. 15:16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.*)
- 5) **Fellowship with God**

-Purity is part of being in fellowship with God and this is required of us as God's Temple: "touch no unclean thing" – 1 Cor. 6:17

-The only power we have to live out the implications of being God's temple – the only way we can really be and act in light of our true identity in Christ, is by "coming to him" – 1 Pet. 2:4. As we come to him, we are being built up. We "draw near" as Hebrews says, to God's throne-room. (*Heb. 4:14-16 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*)

6) **Communion as the One Feast** of the New Temple. I can't leave this out, as we'll be experiencing this shortly! (Heb. 13:10 "we have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat" may indicate this. But ultimately it is about feasting on Christ – spiritually (as John 6 teaches). We get to enjoy the benefits of Christ's GREAT SACRIFICE. We feast on His body and blood, spiritually, and this is what sustains us – this is our one true feast.

C. Ultimately, and by God's grace, we come to be the **adornment of God's Temple**.

- 1) Luke 21:5 (And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said,) – we are "living stones", and our lives are "living offerings" that adorn God's living Temple.
- 2) Rev. 3:12 promises that (the one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.) This reminds us that, we will experience and even greater sense of being God's Temple one day. We are already living in God's presence in His temple, but one day we will know so much more of His presence. The end-times Temple is already here, but it's not yet here in the glory and splendor with which it will ultimately shine.
- 3) Rev. 21:3 and 7, with v. 22 conclude the story of all of Scripture and are the ultimate and final fulfillment of all God's glorious promises. Turn there with me.

CONCLUSION

I hope this vision of God's Temple, and our participation in this great theme of God being God for His people and setting His dwelling place among them, will inspire you. I hope it adds great significance to what often can seem mundane and routine. When we meet together, Jesus Christ is with us. God the Holy Spirit indwells us corporately as a church, and individually as Christians. The struggles to keep believing, to keep fighting the flesh, to keep struggling against sin, to keep waking up and not checking out on life, the sorrows, the heartaches, all of that is worth it! We are a company of priests, we are carrying special golden bowls full of incense, as we pray. We are living lives that are a fragrant and sweet smell to our Heavenly Father. And we do this more easily, and more sweetly, the closer we are to Christ, and the more we "draw near" to Him in prayer and in fellowship and Bible reading. May God give us eyes to see how greatly He has blessed us in that we are the body of Christ Jesus His Son, and we are also the one True Temple of God on earth in this age. May the Glory of the Lord cover the earth as the waters cover the sea!