

The Temple Has Come. Immanuel!

December 6, 2020

This past week, when I began my family devotions with my children, I asked them what “Advent” means. They weren’t sure, but they were sure that I explained it to them every year! So, I told them. Advent refers to the arrival of something. And when we talk about the arrival of something that means the beginning of something great and grand! Every year, most Christians in the world remember the arrival of Jesus! And, each year here at Ventura, we have a few sermons surrounding the Advent of Christ. This is exciting. This is glorious! God took on flesh to come into this sinful, broken world and to redeem it! But why is this so exciting? I remember a Christian teacher once say that some people believe that we’re accepted by God by our works. Others believe we’re accepted by God on the basis of faith. Still, most people in America probably believe we’re accepted by God upon our death. In other words, people believe God accepts us *no matter what*.

If you have that belief, then Christmas isn’t really exciting. There’s no point to Jesus’ arrival. The reality is that God is holy, holy, holy. He is utterly perfect and just. In his justice, he punishes sinners. And all the world is born sinful! That’s a problem for us! How can this problem be solved? Answer: The God-Man who came in the flesh. The title for this sermon is “The Temple Has Come.” And with that title, I am stating my belief that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Temple. In order to write this sermon, I was deeply indebted to a specific book – a book I’d encourage you to read. It’s called *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, and it was written by J. Daniel Hays.

Now, why a sermon on the Temple? What does this have to do with Christmas? Why should this excite us about Jesus’ advent? Well, as we study certain truths related to the Temple, you will begin to see how no human being can be accepted simply by their own death, but instead, we will see God’s splendor in contrast to our sinfulness, and then we will see how we need One who is Holy who can bring us back to God. To see these things, we must now go all the way back to the beginning with creation.

The Creation as a Temple

In the beginning, after God creates Adam and Eve, we discover that God reveals his presence in a special way in the midst of a garden. There’s beautiful stones and gold. There’s food from the plants. But the greatest glory is revealed in Genesis 3:8. Moses writes, “**8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden**”¹

This word for “walking” is also used of God’s presence in the tabernacle. So here, in Genesis, we have an aspect of worship. God revealing himself and people enjoying his presence. Then, in the midst of this Garden of Eden, there’s one special tree – the tree of life. This tree reveals that in God’s paradise is life. We also discover that in this paradise, God also gives Adam work to accomplish. God commands him to “work it and take care of it.” The only other times these two verbs are used together are actually in reference to the Levites guarding and ministering in the sanctuary. Then we are also told that a river flows out of Eden to water the garden. Interestingly enough, in Ezekiel’s vision of the temple, a river flows out of that.

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 3:8.

When we put these pieces together, we can see why commentators would believe that creation was a temple, and Eden was essentially a Holy of Holies. God's presence was revealed, and Adam and Eve had direct communication with the Lord. As priests to God, they were able to live out God's intention for humans. To worship God and experience meaning in all they do.

But everything changed when Adam and Eve believed the lie of the serpent. Instead of trusting the Lord, Adam and Eve desired to be at the same level as God. In the moment of eating the fruit, Eve wasn't simply disobeying a small rule. Eve was declaring her love for herself and her desire to usurp the righteous, temple reign of God. She declared herself to be autonomous of God by eating the fruit that God created. How could she survive in a world God created? How could she know life, meaningful work, worship, relationship without God as central? She can't. She suffered and so did all of creation. But not only Eve. Adam as well. As the representative and leader, Adam failed.

So, God punished both. He placed them outside the garden. And outside the garden is separation from God's gracious presence, death, struggle and pain. We're told then that God places cherubim to guard the entrance of garden of Eden, which is on the east side of the garden. Just so you know, an east entrance is important. The tabernacle's entrance is on the east and so is Solomon's temple. So here, we have cherubim guarding Adam and Eve from being able to eat from the tree of life because if they eat from the tree, they will remain in sin and never enjoy God's presence. So, God sends Adam and Eve away from the garden.

At this point in the story though, we should be shocked that God allows them to remain alive at all. In fact, God allows people to live long enough to have children and have an ancestry. Why? Because God promises Eve that there's going to be a woman's seed that is going to crush the serpent. Someday, the curse will be abolished. Life, meaningful work, worship, relationship and feasting will return. But not yet.

In moving away from Eden (further east), we see what people do when they reject God. Longing for worship, but not for God, they build a tower to try to gain access to heaven. We see people living life without thought of God. Humans are wreaking havoc in his creation. God warns and punishes and yet people still head east of his presence. But even in people's rejection of God, God has a plan. In Exodus, we read of a man named Moses. Having fled from Egypt as a murderer, we read the following of him in Exodus 3:1 – **“Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.”**²

Do you see it? You're probably thinking, “see what?!” I get it. Most of us read this verse and we simply see the details of what Moses is doing and where he is. But let me give you a hint. If we have been picking up on the theme of sinners moving to the east, then we should see something here. Moses, in fleeing Egypt, began to head west. He was not planning on an encounter with God's presence. Moses had essentially done just what Adam and Eve had done by fleeing and hiding. Yet, we see even in Moses' sin, God is providentially drawing not only Moses to himself – but a people to himself. God speaks to Moses through a flaming bush that isn't disintegrating. And Moses eventually obeys what God tells him.

As you know, God sends Moses to Egypt. Moses does go and *long story short*, God sets the Israelite people free from Egypt. Over time, the people receive God's command for them to build a tabernacle. Why? It communicates God's presence with them. It communicates grace, forgiveness and even hope of eternal reconciliation and even hope of purpose and meaning in being restored as humans.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ex 3:1.

God's Presence & The Tabernacle

What's interesting about all of this is that fact that God hasn't only drawn Moses westward, but he's drawn a people westward – back to his presence. And, in the tabernacle specifications, we see God telling people that they can come into his presence again, even though it's a veiled presence.

Having said this, listen to some of the things about the building of the tabernacle. I hope you to see the connections that the tabernacle has with the creation account itself. In the creation account, we read, "And God said" seven times. In the tabernacle account, we read, "Then the LORD said" seven times. Not only is God the Supreme Ruler. But God is the LORD – meaning, the covenant-keeping God. He's revealing covenant promises in the building of this tabernacle.

As we look at the construction of this tabernacle, we quickly discover that Moses is the mediator of the building of it. Meaning, God is commanding and Moses is expressing God's commands. In this building, gold and precious jewels are mentioned – like in Eden. As I said earlier, the entrance of the tabernacle is to face the east, just like Eden. And, as within the creation story, God rests on the seventh day; so, the final statement after the completion of the tabernacle, the people are reminded of the command for Sabbath rest in Exodus 31:12-18).

Some of the things that existed in the temple were the table with the Bread of Presence. While this table could not be directly handled by people's hands because of our sinfulness, this table also signified hope in having friendship and a covenant relationship with God. In addition to this table, we find a golden lampstand. The lampstand was in the shape of a tree. But this tree is on fire. In the Bible, trees can signify life. And fire speaks to the light of God's presence being consuming and powerful. I personally think this also takes us back to the Tree of Life. One other interior piece I want to mention is the incense altar. This altar was to be carried by poles as well, signifying the holiness of God. On the annual Day of Atonement, when the High Priest entered the Holy Place, he had to ensure that incense was coming from the altar and actually wafting from the altar into the next section of the tabernacle – the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies was where God revealed more of his glory. And yet, when the High Priest entered, his presence had to be shrouded with smoke. While in God's presence, it's still in a sense veiled.

One of the most beautiful realities of the tabernacle structure (to me) are the interior walls of the holy place. There are linens of beautiful pure-white sheets. The white describes royalty as well as purity and holiness. But do you know what's embroidered on the interior linens? With bluish-purple-reddish wool yarn, cherubim are embroidered on them. When were cherubim mentioned before? At the entrance of Eden. But there, they were keeping people out. In this scenario, they, in a sense, worship alongside a priesthood.

And they even allow one priest access to the Holy of Holies. This holy of holies is 15x15, and it could only be entered one time a year on that Day of Atonement. Within the holy of holies is one thing: the ark of the covenant. In this ark/box, God commanded Moses to put the 10 commandments in it as well as a jar of manna and Aaron's budded and blossomed staff. All of these items symbolize God's protection, provision and covenant. But they also are a reminder of Israel's disobedience and grumbling. Even in the midst of their sin, God showed mercy. And so, on top of this box is what some call the atonement cover. On the Day of Atonement, the priest would come in with the blood of the sacrificed animal and put it on the cover of the lid. This signified that the sins of the Israelites in just the past year deserved death. And there was death on their behalf so that they could be forgiven. Now, over this lid are two cherubim.

Their wings span the length of the cover and the cherubim are looking down at where the blood would have been smeared.

As we think about the interior of the tabernacle, we see jewels and gold. We see cherubim. We see representations of a garden. We see people (i.e. – the priests) with meaningful work. We see the ability to begin to worship God. We see God’s presence as central to living. And, once this tabernacle was built, we read this in Exodus 40:34-35: **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.”**³

This tabernacle continued for quite some time, but as we look at Israel’s history, the people begin to treat the tabernacle and the box of the covenant like a lucky rabbit’s foot. Like Adam and Eve, they want their way when they want it. Almost nobody in Israel is faithful to the Lord. Eventually, we get to King David. God blesses David. And David wants to build a new place for the ark of the covenant. God communicates that he doesn’t need it, but also states that David can’t built it because he’s a man of war. So, he says a son will build the temple. David begins to get supplies so his son, Solomon, will build a temple.

God’s Presence & The Temple

And once Solomon is King, he does build a magnificent temple. Like Moses, it seems Solomon should be a faithful mediator in building this temple. But Solomon doesn’t seem to be as faithful as he ought to have been. When you read about the tabernacle construction, there is a slew of reference of God commanding the building. But with the Temple, Solomon is the one commanding. The only word we get from God is in 1 Kings 6, and it’s a warning: **12 “Concerning this house that you are building, if you will walk in my statutes and obey my rules and keep all my commandments and walk in them, then I will establish my word with you, which I spoke to David your father. 13 And I will dwell among the children of Israel and will not forsake my people Israel.” 14 So Solomon built the house and finished it.**⁴

God tells Solomon that he wants his heart and it seems that Solomon simply builds the house and finished it. Why do I say that? In constructing the temple, 1 Kings 5 tells us that Solomon forces Israelite labor to build the temple. Solomon is more like the Pharaoh of Egypt than like Moses. Solomon also hires a Canaanite to build the Temple. And in contrast to the tabernacle building, we see many references of Solomon commanding and Hiram obeying Solomon. No command from the Lord to Solomon. Finally, as Solomon builds all of this, he receives a lot of wood from the king of Tyre. And so, Solomon, in payment, gives the king twenty towns in Galilee! This is no small thing. Solomon gives back the promised land that was taken in conquest!

Remember God’s words: without faithful obedience, the temple has no point. God is not interested in impressive temples. While God does bless the people with his presence in this temple, the people again reveal their hearts. The great problem of humanity is that they refuse to worship Him – and no building is going to rescue people. Only God can rescue. Therefore, God is jealous for our worship. Only in him we have life and meaning.

History moves on in Israel, and finally, God decrees the Israelites to be taken in captivity by Babylon and the temple is destroyed. A second temple is built. Later, it’s modified before the times of Jesus. But

³ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ex 40:34–35.

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Ki 6:12–14.

God's glory never descends on these temples. To add to this, God stops speaking through prophets for over 400 years. Silence.

Humans have repeatedly shown their sinfulness against God and they have also revealed their nature to worship, but they won't worship God. And God seems silent. Can you imagine this? Have you ever felt God was silent towards you? If you're a Christian, the reality is that God is never silent towards you. But for Israel, he was silent. No glory in the temple. Silence through prophets. The temple has not saved them. This leads to many questions, like **"Has God decided to not forgive people? Has God decided to leave humanity in the cesspool of its sinfulness? Does only doom await?"** Have you ever wondered questions like this for yourself? Has God left you in your sin? Will God forgive you? The advent of Jesus answers these questions!

God's Presence and Jesus

You see, one prophet named Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 7:14, **"¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."⁵** Immanuel. This word means "God with us." For hundreds of years, God has withheld his Temple-presence from the people, but God speaks through Isaiah saying that God will come and be with his people again.

And so, in John 1:1 and verse 14, we read, **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.⁶ ¹⁴And 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."⁷**

What we don't see in the English is the word for "dwelt" that is used in the Greek. It could more literally be translated "tabernacled." The Word became flesh and "tabernacled" among us. And he revealed God's glory. The wording of John here is that Jesus is the Temple of God. Jesus is the offspring of David who is bringing the Temple of God to us. Or, like Matthew emphasizes, Jesus is "God with Us."

So, two thousand years ago, within the womb of Mary, God's glory descended and took on human flesh. Upon Jesus' birth, priests didn't come and worship, but shepherds were welcomed to worship the Shepherd of Israel. Jesus, God in the flesh, tabernacled with humanity and revealed God's glory wherever he went.

But there's more. Jesus also says of himself in Matthew 12:6, "I tell you, something greater than the temple is here."⁸ Jesus is superior to the temple because he is what the temple pointed to! As I said earlier, no building can save people. Cold stone can't save! But what about flesh and blood? What about a Mediator who is sinless and perfect in all of his ways? What about One who can actually relate to us and relate to God? That's Jesus! He is the temple that the 2nd Temple pointed to. When Jesus talks of destroying the Temple, he was speaking of that temple being destroyed, but he was also talking of his own body being destroyed and raising from the dead in three days.

And in Jesus' death, he was the atoning sacrifice for the sins of people. His blood, not the blood of an animal, was shed for people in their place. He took the punishment sinners deserved. And God accepted

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Is 7:14.

⁶ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 1:1.

⁷ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 1:14.

⁸ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 12:6.

Jesus' sacrifice. So, three days later, Jesus rose from the dead with a resurrected body. And now all who turn from their sins and turn to him as their Lord and Savior, are brought back in relationship with God.

As a result, the apostle Peter says we who trust Jesus are now a kingdom of priests to our God. Hold on a second. Like in the Garden of Eden, we can fellowship with God and we are restored as kings and priests under the Rule of our Creator.

But there's still more. In Revelation, we're told the Tree of Life will return and we will eat from it. We are also told we will feast with him in fellowship. There are no angels keeping us from worshipping him. No veil holding us back from his presence. Instead, in this New Heaven and New Earth, we see a garden-city with angels. There, in that place, are precious stones. There are trees. There's a river coming from the throne of God and the Lamb (which is the Temple). And we behold his glory shining in all of its grandeur. There, people perfectly worship the Lord. They are in his presence. And there's no smoke to shroud him. We will see him face-to-face in glorious relationship. All the temple and tabernacle pictures point to this glory!

And Jesus brings all of this because of his first advent! **Jesus dwelt among us to personally bring God's glory to us. When you think of Christmas, think of the holiness of God – that he is wondrous and we are rebels. But also think of this wonderful God choosing to rescue rebels and accepting us – giving us a new home where we will worship and experience eternal life, relationship, meaningful work, and provision from the Lord forever.**

How do you respond to this? As Christians, I urge you to savor the Word that reveals Jesus to you and reminds you of all that he is! If you have not trusted Jesus, I urge you to ask someone today what it means to trust in the Lord. If you are a follower of Jesus, I pray that you would know (and even preach to yourself) that Jesus coming in the flesh means you have fellowship with God, forgiveness, eternal hope, and even true meaning to all your work (in whether you eat or drink or whatever you do). We are a kingdom of priests to our God in everything because Jesus is our Great High Priest who was Immanuel, God with us.