**A Holy Temple in the Lord, Part 1**

**Ephesians 2:20-22**

**October 18, 2020**

1. Introduction
   1. As we return to our study of Ephesians this morning, we come once again to the apostle’s great teaching about the doctrine of the church.
      1. We have seen how God created the church in v. 15 where Paul says that Christ made both Jews and Gentiles into one new man.
         1. The one new man is the church.
         2. We know that because the one new man is described in v. 16 as one body, the one body in which we are reconciled to God.
         3. This body is the body of Christ, the church, as Eph 1:22-23 states so clearly.
      2. The church, then, is the body of Christ composed of people from different backgrounds, nations, languages, and ethnicities.
         1. The two groups in view are the Jews and Gentiles in this passage, two groups that previously hated one another – and indeed still hated one another if they were unbelievers apart from Christ.
         2. God overcame the division between Jews and Gentiles through the cross of Christ, and He created this united body, the church.
      3. The unity of the church is emphasized throughout this section, especially in v. 18, where we see that we all have our access to the Father in the exact same way: through Christ by the Spirit of God.
         1. No one has privileged access or special access to God.
         2. Sometimes people have asked me to pray for them because I’m a pastor, so they think I have some special access to God they don’t have.
         3. But the reality is that in Christ we are all united before God and have the exact same access: we come to God through the blood of Christ in the power of the Spirit.
      4. This teaching about the creation of the church and the unity in the church of both Jews and Gentiles in Christ, which extends to all people in the church regardless of what other differences they may have, leads Paul on to the great truth he wants us to understand as he brings this chapter to its climax: The church of Jesus Christ is the assembly where the presence of God is most clearly manifest in the world.
         1. This truth about the church must be the truth that shapes and guides everything we think about the church.
         2. The church is a wonderful thing, and being part of the church has so many benefits and blessings.
            1. When you’re part of the church, you build relationships with other Christians, relationships that can help you through difficult seasons of life, relationships that bring joy to your life, relationships that challenge you and help you grow more like Christ.
            2. We often find our closest friends at church because we fellowship with people of like mind, who share our deepest values and convictions.
            3. We learn the Word of God when we gather together as the church, and to hear the preached Word is an inestimable blessing.
            4. We have the great blessing of singing together with incredibly gifted musicians, joining all of our voices together in praise to God as we gather, and what a joy and blessing that is.
            5. We have people who are praying for us, and elders who shepherd us and watch over our souls.
            6. We have a place where we can use our gifts to help others in their walk with Christ.
            7. If we have kids, we have a place where our kids can make friends, learn about Christ, build significant relationships, and learn what it means to be a Christian.
            8. There are so many blessings when you are part of the local church as a follower of Christ.
         3. But one of the dangers we face as believers is to turn the church into a me-centered environment, where I begin to think of the church and all that it does as revolving around me.
            1. I have all of these blessings as part of the church, which is wonderful, but I can begin to think that the reason why I should be part of the church begins and ends with the way I benefit.
            2. We are all tempted at times to think that way, perhaps not even consciously, but in the way we treat others, or serve, or our underlying attitude about things.
            3. But here Paul wants us to realize that the reason we exist as a church is not primarily to find friends or get emotional or spiritual support or hear incredible music or gain more intellectual understanding of the Bible, as helpful and even necessary as those things are, but the reason we exist as a gathered assembly of believers is to manifest the presence of God in the world.
   2. The way Paul shows this truth to us in vv. 19-22 is rich and complex.
      1. He uses three images to show us how we as the church manifest God’s presence in the world.
      2. And these images are both straightforward but incredibly profound.
      3. They are straightforward because they are all familiar images, things we all have significant experience with in the world.
      4. But they are profound and complex because Paul wants us to think past our experience and connect these images to their biblical significance within all of God’s Word.
      5. This morning, then, we want to continue to look at these images that show how we manifest God’s presence in the world and what the significance of these particular images is to help us understand who and what we are as the church.
      6. The first image in v. 19 is that we manifest God’s presence as…
2. Citizens of God’s Kingdom (v. 19)
   1. We live life as citizens of another kingdom, no longer dominated by the cares of this life or of this world.
   2. We manifest God’s presence when, as the body of Christ, we seek first God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness.
   3. Second, we manifest the presence of God when we recognize that we are…
3. Members of God’s Family (v. 19)
   1. When we gather as the church, it is a family reunion every Sunday.
      1. We come together and meet with our Father.
      2. We are brothers and sisters, brought into the family of God, the household of God as the children of God.
   2. Last time I noted that these two images are vital to understanding what Paul is driving at in this chapter.
      1. Individually, they are very powerful images that shape how we think about the church.
      2. But when we combine them and put them in a biblical context, we see something even greater than either of these pictures separately.
   3. By joining these two images, the image of the kingdom and the image of the family, Paul is calling our attention to Israel and the connection of the new covenant church with old covenant Israel.
      1. Think about what Israel was under the old covenant.
         1. Israel was, first of all, of course, a person, Jacob, the grandson of Abraham.
         2. And immediately when we hear the term *grandson*, our minds are drawn to the picture of the family.
            1. Israel was a family before it was a nation, wasn’t it?
            2. You remember when Israel went down to Egypt at the end of Genesis.
            3. Israel was hardly anything worth noticing, a group of 70 people who were all part of one family, with Israel as the father, the patriarch of that family.
            4. They all went down to Egypt, which was the nation where they lived for 400 years.
            5. During all of that time, Israel was not a nation but rather subservient to another nation.
            6. They were just one giant family, and in a sense they were the family of God as the family of Israel.
            7. We see that when God commissioned Moses in Exodus 4:22, saying, **“Israel is My son, My firstborn.”**
            8. So there Israel was in Egypt, no political power and not a nation in any meaningful way, but they were all related, all one family descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
         3. But then God delivered Israel through the great Exodus, with the plagues and the parting of the sea and all of the signs and wonders and miracles God performed through Moses.
            1. And when God had brought Israel safely to Mount Sinai, He said this to them in Exodus 19:6: **“And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”**
            2. This family was no longer just a family, but suddenly this small band of 70 people who had gone down to Egypt came out and was a mighty nation.
         4. Israel, then, was this unique entity under the old covenant with Moses; they were a nation-family, or a family-nation.
            1. You really couldn’t divide it up and choose one or the other.
            2. They were twelve tribes who came from twelve brothers.
            3. But they also were a kingdom, with a king and princes and an army and all that makes up a nation.
      2. When we look at what Paul is doing in Ephesians 2, I want you to notice how he links the church under the new covenant with Israel under the old covenant.
         1. If we go back to v. 12, we see the former condition of the Gentiles apart from Christ.
            1. They were strangers to the covenants of promise.

That means that they were outside the family of Abraham.

The covenants of promise were made with Abraham and with his offspring.

So to be a stranger to the covenant of promise was to be outside the family of Israel.

* + - * 1. But they were also excluded from the commonwealth of Israel.

That is to say, they were not citizens of the nation of Israel, either!

They were citizens of an earthly state, or maybe not citizens of any state at all if they didn’t have citizenship in Ephesus or Rome.

But whatever the case, they were most certainly not citizens of the nation of Israel.

They were excluded from this nation, outsiders looking in.

We might even sum it up by saying that they were aliens.

* + - 1. Then in v. 13 we begin to see this great reversal that takes place, because now the Gentiles have been brought near.
         1. However, we do not see exactly what that means in relation to the family of Israel and the nation of Israel.
         2. We do see that the cross is what has made the difference.
         3. And then we see that whatever it means, it does not mean we are part of Israel under the old system of the Law of Moses.
         4. Christ has created one new man, a new humanity, in this one new body that is the church.
      2. But v. 19 shows us that this new humanity cannot be disconnected from God’s promises to Israel or our inclusion in Israel.
         1. What was formerly true is now undone in Christ, and we are no longer strangers who are outside the family or aliens who lack citizenship.
         2. We are now citizens with the saints, which means we are part of the eschatological kingdom of God.

We are citizens of the kingdom of God promised to Israel in the Old Testament and fulfilled in Jesus Christ in the New.

The reason Paul calls the citizens *saints* in this context is to make sure we understand that this kingdom is not defined by ethnic boundaries but by the holiness that only comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

We are not citizens with the Jews or citizens with ethnic Israel because, sadly and tragically, there are Jewish people who are not part of this kingdom.

Jesus Himself prophesied about this in Luke 13:28-29…

Who is Jesus talking about?

Who are these people who see the patriarchs and the prophets in the kingdom but who are being thrown out?

They are the very people who witnessed Jesus’ miracles and heard His teaching but did not believe in Him.

They are the Jewish people who saw Him and heard Him but rejected Him as the Messiah.

They will be cast out of the kingdom, while people from the four corners of the world will come streaming in.

And these Gentiles from all over the globe will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets, their fellow citizens in this kingdom, and enjoy the blessings of the kingdom when it comes in its fullness.

So, Paul says, we are not strangers any more, not aliens anymore from the commonwealth of Israel, but we are now part of the new covenant people of God enjoying full citizenship in the kingdom of God with all those who are in Christ by faith.

* + - * 1. And because there is this continuity between old covenant Israel and the new covenant church, we are also members of the same family, the household of God.

We are not strangers to the covenants of promise.

We are in fact grafted in by adoption as sons of God, and we are now the heirs of the covenants of promise through Jesus Christ.

That’s what it means to be sons of God, that we are now the heirs of the promises of God made to Abraham.

Paul says this very thing so clearly in Galatians 3:26…

We are in God’s household as God’s sons through faith in Jesus Christ.

We don’t earn our way into this family, and we can’t get in by our genealogical line.

The only way in is through faith in Jesus Christ.

And then Paul highlights the significance of this in v. 29…

As sons you are heirs!

Why?

Because if you are sons of God through faith in Christ, then you belong to Christ, and if you belong to Christ, the true Son of Abraham, then by virtue of your union with Christ you too are a son of Abraham.

And if you are a son of Abraham, you are an heir according to promise.

All of God’s promises to Abraham become yours through your adoption into the household of God.

It’s our family status as children of God that allows Paul to make this sweeping claim in 2 Cor 1:20…

Where are the promises of God guaranteed?

Only in Christ.

And to whom do they belong?

They belong to those who are in Christ.

Paul is encouraging the Gentile Corinthians that every promise God has ever made belongs to them in Christ, so that they should never read the Bible and come across a promise God makes to His people and say, “That doesn’t apply to me.”

In Christ, they are all yes, as many as there are promises of God.

Why are they yours?

Because you are part of the family of God.

* + - 1. This connection between God’s promises in the Old Testament and their fulfillment in the church must be true because the old divisions have passed away and God has created one, new humanity in Christ.
         1. It would be very confusing to say that the cross of Christ has broken down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles, but there are some things that are only relevant to the Jews in Christ.
         2. See, this division is completely gone.
         3. We are one new humanity, one body, one kingdom, one family, and what belongs to some of us in Christ belongs to all of us in Christ.
         4. Christ did not die to secure certain promises for Gentiles and different promises for Jews who believe in Him.
         5. That would not be a unified body.
         6. That would not be a reconciled humanity through the cross.
         7. That would be division, the same kind of division we read that Christ died to abolish.
         8. We are all reconciled to God in one body, and we all come to know Jesus Christ through believing one and the same gospel.
    1. It is this glorious unity we have in Christ as one kingdom and one family that manifests the presence of God in a unique and mighty way in the world.
    2. And the fact that we are a kingdom family in Christ means that we are the fulfillment under the new covenant of what Israel was called to be under the old.
  1. If you think about the church being the fulfillment of Israel, there is something significant missing from the picture, and that something is a temple.
     1. How can God manifest His presence on earth without a temple?
     2. How can we as a kingdom family show this fulfillment if we don’t have a temple?
     3. And so that is the third image Paul uses to show us that as the church we are to manifest the presence of God in the world; we are…

1. Stones in God’s House (vv. 20-22)
   1. The imagery from being God’s household to being God’s house might seem jarring to a 21st century American reader.
      1. Being God’s household might seem more intimate than being God’s house, and so this might actually seem to be movement backward.
      2. But the imagery makes sense from an Old Testament perspective if you understand that Paul is presenting the church as the fulfillment of Israel, composed of Jews and Gentiles who collectively manifest the presence of God in the world.
      3. The temple was the center of God’s presence in Israel.
         1. The temple replaced the tabernacle, the portable tent where God’s presence dwelled above the ark between the cherubim.
         2. Solomon finished building the temple in 1 Kings 7, and then in the next chapter they dedicated the temple.
         3. And we read in 1 Kings 8:10-11…
            1. God takes up residence in His house, in His temple.
            2. His glory fills the temple.
            3. And so it was that when people wanted to come near to the presence of God, what did they do?
            4. They had to travel to Jerusalem where the temple was located.
            5. That was where God’s glory dwelled, in the holy of holies in the temple.
         4. But then over time, Israel rebelled against God.
            1. Repeatedly, they rejected God and worshiped idols.
            2. They defiled God’s temple, where His glory dwelled, and they brought in all of their detestable things.
            3. We have been reading about this as we have gone through Ezekiel.
            4. I know sometimes it might seem strange to read through a book like Ezekiel because it has so much judgment and can be difficult to understand, but it’s so vital because it shows us how sin alienates people from God.
            5. And when we read Ezekiel 10-11, we read the account of the glory of God departing from the temple because of Israel’s sin.
            6. It went from the holy of holies and gradually moved out of the temple and finally out of Jerusalem altogether.
            7. And the temple was abandoned, and God’s glory found no home on earth because Israel had become consumed with their idolatry.
            8. The empty temple stood for a while longer, a monument to Israel’s colossal failure, until finally in 586 it was destroyed by the Babylonians.
         5. Israel eventually rebuilt the temple in the time of Ezra and the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.
            1. But it’s interesting to read the account of the temple being completed in Ezra 6:13-18.

They finish the temple, they dedicate the temple, and they even have a feast to celebrate its completion.

But unlike 1 Kings, the glory of God does not appear.

They celebrate the Passover, and still the glory of God does not appear.

* + - * 1. The prophet Haggai is asked about this by the Lord in Haggai 2:3…

Look at the rebuilt temple now!

It is nothing by comparison to the glory it had.

Yes, they rebuilt it, but it was not the same.

* + - * 1. And so God makes this staggering promise in Haggai 2:9…

The glory of the temple under Solomon, as we have seen, was so great that no one could even enter the temple.

And now they have this new temple which lacks this glory, but God promises that a temple is coming in the last days that will have a glory that surpasses even the temple of Solomon!

* + - 1. Strangely enough, the glory of God never re-appears in the earthly temple.
         1. Even when Herod rebuilds it in the first century, the glory of God was not there.
         2. The Jews were impressed by the new temple by all accounts.

The Jews pointed out to Jesus how magnificent the building was.

The disciples themselves highlighted for Jesus the incredible glory, at least from an earthly, architectural perspective, of Herod’s temple.

But Jesus was unimpressed because Jesus saw an empty building with a holy of holies that contained nothing.

* + - * 1. In fact, the glory of God that had departed from the temple had never returned to earth, that is, until Jesus came.

John indicates for us that Jesus is the embodiment of this glory in John 1:14…

Jesus was full of glory!

Where did we read that in the Old Testament?

We read that about God filling the temple with glory!

Jesus came and was full of glory, finally, the glory of God returning to earth after such a long departure!

And to make this abundantly clear for us, John records the first time Jesus drove out the money changers in the temple in John 2.

They were irate with Jesus for interfering with the house of God, the place where God’s glory supposedly dwelled.

And they demanded Jesus give them a sign for His authority to act this way in God’s house before, supposedly, God’s glory.

In John 2:19, Jesus answered them…

The Jews were stupefied by this response.

First, they would never dare destroy their beloved temple that was still in progress after 46 years of work.

And then they reject that Jesus could rebuild what took 46 years in just 3 days (v. 20).

So John adds this little comment for our benefit in v. 21…

Jesus came as the embodiment of the glory of God.

And His body was the true temple, not the structure in Jerusalem built by Herod.

The glory of God was not in the earthly building; the glory of God was in the Son of God.

He was the fulfillment of Haggai’s promise.

How could the glory of the last days temple be more glorious than the glory of Solomon’s temple?

Because the glory of the future temple was not going to be found in a building but in a person, and in that person’s body, and that person would be the very Son of God.

That’s why in John 4, when the Samaritan woman begins to wonder about the location of worship, Jesus says that location is going to be irrelevant.

The old way of thinking of God’s presence in a building is over.

Jesus is the presence of God.

* + - 1. Of course, the issue is that they crucified Jesus, the very embodiment of the glory of God!
         1. The first time the Babylonians destroyed the temple, but this time the Jews along with Pilate and the Gentiles joined together to destroy the temple.
         2. But they couldn’t destroy, because, as Jesus said, He would raise it up in three days.
         3. And so Jesus rose from the dead, hallelujah!
         4. But then He ascended into heaven, and it seems like maybe we’re right back where Israel was in Ezekiel.
         5. God rejected, His glory departed, and no presence of God in glory on earth.
      2. Jesus’ body is the presence of the glory of God, right?
         1. Jesus’ body is the temple, the true temple of God.
         2. Jesus’ body is the latter-day temple.
         3. And Ephesians 2:16 says that we have been reconciled to God in one body, the body of Christ.
         4. Christ is in heaven, but He has left the church on earth, and we are the body of Christ on earth.
         5. And that means that we are the house of God.
    1. Now, it’s not just that we are this house in some abstract way, but Paul wants us to understand in this passage that we are the very stones out of which the temple of God is built.
       1. There are vast implications to this truth that we are these stones, these living stones as Peter calls us in 1 Peter 2.
       2. And this temple has several features that we need to understand to wrap our minds around what it means that we are a holy temple in the Lord.
       3. Next week, we’ll begin to unpack what it means that we are the stones in God’s house.

1. Conclusion
   1. As we think about what we’ve heard today, we should all be struck by the overwhelming privilege and blessing to know that all of God’s promises are ours in Christ because we are God’s kingdom family.
   2. And not only this, but we have the unique privilege and responsibility as stones in God’s house to be the place where His presence is most clearly manifest in the world.
   3. When we consider these truths, there is no greater blessing a person can have than to be a member of Christ’s church, a member of His glorious body on earth.
   4. If you’re here today and you are not a follower of Christ…