

GOD WITH US

Matthew 21:12-13

12 And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. **13** And He said to them, “It is written, ‘**MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER**’; but you are making it a **ROBBERS’ DEN**.” (**Matthew 21:12–13, 2022 LSB**)

Turn with me to Matthew 21:12-13. Last time we finished Matthew 20, but we’ll save the triumphant entry for Palm Sunday, four weeks from today.

On the final stretch of the journey over the Mount of Olives, Jesus was hailed as “He who comes in the name of the Lord” and “the King who comes in the name of the Lord,” but He was infinitely more than that. Instead of marching with the crowd to the doors of Pilate’s palace, the Antonia, and demanding that Pilate surrender the throne of Israel, Jesus went straight to the Temple and demanded that it be honored not only as His Father’s house but His house as well. Between those who changed money and sold animals, those who did business with them, and the priests who probably shared in the profits, virtually the entire culture was involved in disgracing the Temple.

Let’s dive into these words, beginning with getting a clear understanding of the Temple. To do that, we begin with the Tabernacle.

THE TENT

Soon after giving His people the ten commandments, God commanded Moses to build a large framed tent, where He would dwell with His people. Several chapters of Exodus are devoted to the design of the tent itself, the surrounding courtyard, and the furniture that

would be placed in that tent. It is common to see this tent called The Tabernacle in Old Testament Scriptures, which makes it sound very unique and special. The truth is that it was a tent; that's what the word means. I will call it a tent this morning as much as I can, to emphasize that what made it special and unique was the Holy Occupant, not the address.

God's tent would be 45 feet long, fifteen wide, and fifteen feet square. It was covered with a number of layers of material: fine linen on the inside, then woven goat hair, then ram's skins, and finally goat skins. The courtyard would be 150 feet long and 75 feet wide. It was surrounded by a 7-1/2 foot tall linen curtain hung from wooden poles that sat in large silver bases. It was certainly the largest tent in the camp, and the most uniquely made, but in the end, it was just a tent. If you stood a couple of feet away from it, you wouldn't be able to tell the difference between *that* goat skin and the goat skin covering your own tent, which was probably also framed.

Exodus 40 describes Moses carefully assembling the tent and putting the furnishings inside. When he was done,

34 Then the cloud [the cloud that had led them out of Egypt and would continue to lead them until they crossed into the promised land] covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle. 35 And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had dwelt on it, and the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle. (Exodus 40:34–35, 2022 LSB)

In other words, Yahweh moved in. God Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, filled that small, humble, fragile place with His presence. We aren't told that a little light glowed over the Ark of the Covenant in the back. We are told that the manifest glory of God filled the tent so fully that Moses could not enter it. Yahweh moved in. He came and dwelt among His people, and they beheld His glory. This had never happened before.

THE FIRST TEMPLE

The tent was in use for almost 500 years, through the wilderness wanderings, during the time of the Judges, and through the monarchies of Saul, David, and Solomon. King David got to thinking about this, and mentioned it to the prophet Nathan: “See now, I inhabit a house of cedar, but the ark of God inhabits tent curtains.”

Nathan encouraged David to follow his heart, but that night Yahweh spoke to Nathan.

6 “I have not inhabited a house since the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, even to this day; but I have been going about in a tent, even in a tabernacle [**this is a synonym of tent, not a special religious structure**]. **7** Wherever I have gone about with all the sons of Israel, **did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel, which I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, ‘Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?’”** (2 Samuel 7:6–7, 2022 LSB)

In other words, Yahweh dwelled in a tent with His people and was content to do so. He wasn’t pushing them to build Him a permanent home. Why is that? I think it’s because that first tent was not a picture of God one day having a Temple, but of God one day being a Man. He didn’t need a permanent home, He didn’t need a mighty palace, because the emphasis is always on the Holy Occupant, not the address.

Nevertheless, Yahweh permitted David to plan for a Temple, and for Solomon to build the Temple. First Kings 8 describes the moment when God’s Temple was dedicated.

6 Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of Yahweh to its place, into the inner sanctuary of the house, to the Holy of Holies, under the wings of the cherubim. ... **10** Now it happened that when the priests came out of the holy place, **the cloud filled the house of Yahweh, 11 so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of Yahweh filled the house of Yahweh.** (1 Kings 8:6, 10–11, 2022 LSB)

As with His tent, we again see Yahweh moving in. Again, it is not that a little light began to shine back in the dark recesses over the Ark of the Covenant, but that the manifest glory of God so filled the space that no one could enter it. Again we see that Yahweh dwelt with His people, and they beheld His glory.

GOD MOVES OUT

Ironically, having built the Temple in Jerusalem, the house of God, Solomon became the world's worst idolator. He built houses and altars for virtually every god and deity in the region. Yahweh judged his terrible sin by dividing the one kingdom into two. The two kingdoms continued in idolatry over time, and eventually, both fell to the Babylonians, the northern kingdom in about 721 B.C., and the southern kingdom in about 587 B.C. Shortly before the southern kingdom fell, the prophet Ezekiel described this event:

3 Then the glory of the God of Israel went up from the cherub on which it had been, to the threshold of the house of Yahweh [that is, the glory of God left the Ark of the Covenant and went to the door of the sanctuary] ... **18** Then the glory of Yahweh departed from the threshold of the house and stood over the cherubim. **19** When the cherubim departed, they lifted their wings and rose up from the earth in my sight with the wheels beside them; and they stood still at the entrance of the east gate of the house of Yahweh [at the eastern edge of the Temple mount], and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them. (Ezekiel 9:3, 10:18-19, 2022 LSB)

Yahweh moved out of His house. He left the place where He had dwelt with His people for more than 800 years. He was not driven out; He chose to leave. His people had made it clear that they had no interest in Him, and He responded by withdrawing His presence from them.

THE SECOND TEMPLE

Exactly on schedule, according to the promise Yahweh made through Jeremiah 70 years after the southern kingdom was taken captive, the Persian king Cyrus gave permission for the Temple to be rebuilt. The book of Ezra describes that process, from the resumption of daily offerings to the laying of the foundation of the Temple, to the rebuilding process and the dedication when it was complete. What Ezra never describes is Yahweh moving back in. He didn't move back in. His glory never again filled the Temple. It was still a place to worship and pray. It was still the center of Jewish spiritual life and would be until 70 A.D., 586 years later, when the Romans destroyed it. But it was just an empty shell. A memorial. A preserved historical site. A museum to what had been. It was the used-to-be house of God.

For hundreds of years, that grand, impressive Temple was unoccupied. It just got more impressive over time. Herod the Great launched a rebuilding campaign that took 82 years to complete. The final product, which only lasted a few years before the Romans destroyed it, was unquestionably more dramatic and awe-inspiring than Solomon's Temple. But it was never anything but an empty shell. From an architectural point of view, it was magnificent. Compared to that first tent in which the glory of God rested, it was pathetic.

GOD RETURNS

Did Yahweh ever return? Oh, yes, He did. This is what He said through the prophet Zechariah,

10 “Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold, I am coming **and I will dwell in your midst,**” declares Yahweh. **11** And many nations will join themselves to Yahweh in that day and will become My people. **Then I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that Yahweh of hosts has sent Me to you.”** (Zechariah 2:10–11, 2022 LSB)

But He never occupied the Temple again. Instead, we read in the Gospels,

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God.**
 ... **14** And the Word [**Yahweh God**] became flesh, and dwelt among us [**that is, He**
'tented' among us], and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the
 Father, full of grace and truth. (**John 1:1, 14, 2022 LSB**)

The Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled all of the functions of the tent in His Person.

First and foremost, God came and dwelt among us in Jesus Christ. Jesus was, is, and forever shall be fully God and fully Man. Having moved into that tent of human flesh, God the Son will never move out. Jesus truly is Emmanuel, God-with-us.

What's more, Jesus Christ is the means by which pours out His grace upon men and women. John's Gospel goes on to say,

16 For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. (**John 1:16, 2022 LSB**)

Grace heaped upon grace. Grace piled upon grace. Grace that overflows. Grace that takes away sin. Grace that lifts us to the Father. Grace that transforms sinners. Grace that justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies. Grace, grace, and more grace. Work through all of that, tunnel through it, dig to the bottom, and you'll only find more grace.

Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who was slain for our sins. Each sinner is in debt to God. He requires their very life as the consequence of their sin. No animal death could ever satisfy God because we aren't animals. It took a human life to satisfy His righteous judgment. Jesus died not as a token of God's love, but as a substitute for us. God accepts HIS death in the place of sinners who trust in Christ as their substitute.

Jesus Christ is the High Priest offering the sacrifice. Having offered up His own blood

for us, Jesus continues in His High Priestly role right now, ceaselessly interceding for the people of God. If you want to know what He prays, take a look at John 17; He gives us a pretty good idea.

- He asks that the Father would keep and preserve us (John 17:11).
- He asks that the Father would sanctify us by His Word, which is Truth (John 17:17).

Those are the two primary requests of John 17. Jesus also gives the reasons for these requests:

- That we may be one even as the Father and Son are one (John 17:11).
- That the Scripture would be fulfilled (John 17:12).
- That we would have Jesus' joy (John 17:13).
- That we would be united with the Father and the Son (John 17:23).
- That the world would know that the Father sent the Son (John 17:23).
- That we would be with Jesus where He is and see His glory (John 17:24)

Jesus Christ is the altar upon which He offers His own blood. While describing the Holy of Holies, Hebrews 9:5 calls the top of the Ark of the Covenant “the mercy seat,” the propitiatory. That same word is used of Jesus in First John 2:2,

1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He Himself is the **propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. (1 John 2:1–2, 2022 LSB)**

The high priest would enter the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement and sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the top of the Ark of the Covenant: the mercy seat, the propitiatory. In His death, Jesus was not just the Lamb, but also the High Priest, and the mercy seat upon which His own blood was sprinkled for our cleansing.

BRINGING IT HOME

When we come to Matthew 21:12-13 next week we will see the Lord Jesus enter the Temple in Jerusalem and act as though He owns the place. The truth is that He did own it. But it's not just that He possessed the title deed to the Temple and its contents. He Himself was, and is, the fulfillment of the promise of the Temple.

Through Jesus alone, our sins are forgiven.

Through Jesus alone, we have access to the throne of grace.

Through Jesus alone, we are accepted by the Father.

Through Jesus alone, we are filled with the Holy Spirit as we ourselves become HIS Temple.

And IN Jesus Christ, we also have a home, a place to dwell. That's one reason that the phrase "in Christ" is so powerful.

As we come for the Lord's Table today, let me encourage you to refresh your humility before the Savior, since He has died for us and risen for us. Refresh your worship of Him as your Lord. Renew your love for Him today. Receive His promise of redemption, renewal, hope, and strength.

Jesus Christ is the tent. Hasn't that become obvious? Yahweh directed Moses to make a tent, which was very much like the tents of the people. It was not the tent that was glorious,

but the Occupant. Yahweh permitted David to design and Solomon to build a Temple in Jerusalem and filled it with His glory. That first Temple was certainly impressive, but not completely unlike the other houses in Jerusalem. Again, it was not the building that was glorious, but the Occupant. The Second Temple was built but never occupied. No matter how large and impressive and grand they made it, it remained lifeless. There was no Occupant. Instead, Yahweh moved into human flesh, Jesus Christ, for all time. From His conception for eternity to come, Jesus Christ has been and will remain true God in a true Man. All that Yahweh is, Jesus Christ is. All that a human being is, Jesus Christ is, except without sin.