

Jesus: Where?

Part III of V

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt [lit: tabernacled] among us,
and we have seen his glory,
glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

John 1:14

The Omnipresent Son of God

THE **THIRD VERSE** OF THE BIBLE begins, “**And God said...**” This is repeated again in vv. **6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 28, and 29**. This accounts for one half of all of the phrase’s appearances in the entire Bible. The purpose of God’s speech is that this speech *creates*. When the Word says, “Let there be light,” there *is* light. This is true of literally everything that was made.

We’ve have seen previously that this Word is not mere speech, but is actually the Son of God, “**Through whom are**

all things” (1Co 8:6; cf. John 1:3). Given that the Word or Son of God creates all things exactly **where** he wants them, this would have to mean that he is **omnipresent** (literally: everywhere). We find the Bible affirming God’s omnipresence in many places.

- “Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD.” (Jer 23:24)
- “Thus says the LORD: ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?’” (Isa 66:1)
- “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!” (1Kg 8:27)

While I would make an argument that LORD here necessarily includes all three Persons of the Trinity, a very special and important passage affirms this beyond dispute:

- “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!” (Ps 139:7-8)
More than the others, this verse is highly Trinitarian in its language. Notice, “*your Spirit*” and “*your presence*.” The Spirit belongs to someone. The Presence belongs to someone. To whom do they belong? The LORD.

Now, at this point someone might hear that language and disagree that it is Trinitarian. If I talked about myself saying, “Where will you flee from my spirit,” *my spirit* would not be talking about a different person. But that is precisely the distinction the Church has made between Father and Spirit. They are the same essence, the same God; but they are different Persons. It is correct that *my spirit* is not a different person from me. But that is not how God has revealed himself. The Father possesses the Holy Spirit, and it is the Holy Spirit who is clearly in mind here.

If you can accept that, then it makes understanding the “*presence*” easier. However, this works in reverse too. That is, if you can understand what God’s *presence* is in Scripture, then you can see that it very clearly refers to yet another

person, that is, the Son, and this helps you see that the Spirit is the Holy Spirit. Because if Presence is a person, it makes good sense that the Spirit is too. How might this be?

There is a famous story in [Exodus](#) where Moses asks the LORD to show him his [glory](#) ([Ex 33:18](#)). God seems at first glance not to answer him. “You cannot see my [face](#)” ([20](#)), he says. Moses didn’t ask to see his face ... or did he? You see, [Glory and Face are in some ways interchangeable](#), both terms are used of the Angel of the LORD, and of Jesus Christ in the NT. “In all their affliction he was afflicted, and [the angel of his presence](#) saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old” ([Isaiah 63:9](#)).¹ “[Presence](#)” and “[face](#)” are the same Hebrew term: *paneh* (e.g. to be before God’s face is to be in his presence).

[Ecc 5:6](#) says, “Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the presence (*panim*) of [the Angel](#) [often translated here simply as “messenger;” for “angel” see the Vulgate] [that it was a mistake.](#)” The Septuagint translates it, “[Do not set your mouth to make your flesh sin, and do not](#)

¹ This idea probably goes back to at least [Exodus 23:20-23](#) where *paneh* is found three times in close proximity to the Angel. “I am going to send an angel [before you](#)” (vs. [20](#)) is *malak lepaneh*. Vs. [21](#), “Be on your guard [before him](#)” and “my angel will go [before you](#)” ([23](#)) round it out.

say before God's face [or “before the presence of God]...” In other words, the “angel” is again identified as “God's face.”

Joseph Packard on Malachi 3 writes, “He is called the *face of God*, because though no man can see his face and live, yet the Angel of his face is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person. In him Jehovah's presence is manifested, and his glory reflected, for the glory of God shines in the face of Jesus Christ.”²

In the NT we read things like, “[God] has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God *in the face of Jesus Christ*” (2Co 4:6). Or Speaking of Jesus, “the presence of the Lord and ... the glory of His power” (2Th 1:9). My point in all of this is simply to establish the obvious theological point with Scripture itself. The Word, the Presence—the Son of God is omnipresent. You cannot go anywhere where he is not to be found.

Why begin a sermon this way? We are entering the third of five sermons on the “Ws” of Jesus. Today we look at the “where” question. Where is Jesus or where was Jesus? Jesus

² Lange, J. P., Schaff, P., & Packard, J. (2008). *A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Malachi* (p. 19). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software. Joseph Packard (1812-1902), wrote part of a multi-volume commentary with Philip Schaff and John Lang.

is everywhere is part of that answer. But this is a question often overlooked for the most exciting “who,” “what,” and “why” questions. I believe understanding this question can have a profound influence on your overall thinking of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Why and how would that be? The obvious answer from what we’ve talked about thus far is that if Jesus is omnipresent as the Word and Presence of God, then he is worthy of all adoration and your fealty. For there is no one else who is omnipresent. Certainly, you aren’t. No individual person is, including any of the angels or Satan. Even with all of the collective minds and technology which often feels omnipresent these days, humanity is infinitely away from achieving anything that could be considered omnipresence. And it always will be. Big Brother is not omnipresent. Yet, Jesus Christ is. He is literally everywhere. If that doesn’t blow your mind up, what we will focus the rest of our time on might just finish the job.

The Special Presence of the Son of God

What could be more mind-blowing than the omnipresence of the Son of God? The answer? *The special presence* of God in space and time. We'll see why that is after we look at what we mean by "special presence."

We might start by asking what sense "special presence" even makes for an omnipresent Being? I mean, if he is already everywhere, how is this even intelligible? Someone writes, "The confession of divine omnipresence might suggest a kind of flat, undifferentiated presence of God everywhere. One might imagine that the presence of God everywhere rules out His special presence anywhere. But that would be a mistake. In fact it is precisely God's special presence in particular locations that demonstrates and confirms His presence everywhere."³ How so? Because God's special presence can be and is seen anywhere he desires to put it. But that presupposes that he is everywhere to begin with.

Let's ask more about what God's special presence even is. As Reformed Christians, this language is most often used

³ Darrin Patrick and Mark DeVine, *Replant: How a Dying Church Can Grow Again* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2014).

of [the Lord's Supper](#), that somehow Christ is present in a special way when we take Communion. It isn't just a bare memorial, a remembrance on our part. There is more to it, because Christ is somehow there. Sometimes we hear about it in [the giving of the Gospel](#) (which is what the Supper actually is to all of our senses). That is, when the Gospel goes out, God is especially present in it to save and/or to sanctify people by the Word of his grace. This is why we call both of these things the "means of grace." Thus, some have called God's "special presence" his "[gracious presence](#)."⁴ We will see that this special presence can do more than pour out grace, but the point is this is different from God's omnipresence. For in his omnipresence, God is there basically in his power and divinity, but not necessarily his grace. This is why the special presence should blow your mind.

A less abstract way of understanding the special presence is by linking it to [the special comings](#) of one or more of the Persons of the Trinity. I think of the Baptism of Jesus where the voice of the [Father](#) is heard, the [Spirit](#)-dove hovers and

⁴ For example, [Thomas Ridgley](#), *A Body of Divinity*, vol. 1 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1855), 124.

rests upon the Lord **Jesus**. These things did not happen everywhere in the universe simultaneously. They happened at the Jordan River somewhere outside of the city of Jerusalem in Israel. So somehow, the omnipresent God located himself in a particular spot. For what purpose? It was to publicly anoint Jesus for his ministry and bear witness to the world that everything he would do from that moment onward was an act of grace for sinners as the Second Adam. But, we are moving much too far ahead of ourselves.

Special Presence: In Heaven

If we want to start with the first place of Christ's special presence, it would have to be **in heaven**. Maybe you don't think of his special presence like this, but you should. Thomas Manton writes, "**God's special presence is in heaven, and we are on earth.**"⁵ Isaiah says, "**Heaven is my throne**" (**Isa 66:1**). Now, while it is certainly true that the Father and Spirit have their special presence in heaven too, it is important to know that this is true of the Son as well.

⁵ **Thomas Manton**, *A Practical Commentary, or An Exposition with Notes on the Epistle of James* (London: R. Gladding; John Gladding; Hamilton, Adams, and Co., 1840), 337.

The same Isaiah tells us, “In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord (Adonai) sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple” (Isa 6:1). The setting is not the earthly temple, but the heavenly one. To make things clearer that he was not seeing the Father, the Targum rendered it, “In the year in which King Uzziah was smitten with the leprosy the prophet said, I saw the glory of the Lord sitting upon His throne, high, and lifted up unto the highest heavens, and the temple was filled with the brightness of His glory.”⁶ John makes it clear (using the same “glory” language as the Targum) that, as we have just seen, the Glory is Christ! “Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him” (John 12:41). Where is he seeing Christ? In the *heavenly* temple.

A friend and I have been working on a book on the Angel of the LORD. We have run across on several occasions what we call the “poof” theory. The poof theory insists that the Angel of the LORD is a temporary manifestation of the Second Person, that when he is no longer seen here, it is because he “poofs” out of existence. We do not believe this

⁶ C. W. H. Pauli, tran., *The Chaldee Paraphrase on the Prophet Isaiah* (London: London Society’s House, 1871), Is 6:1.

takes things like the permanent divine council of Daniel 7 or the real location of heaven as a created place seriously enough. While heaven is not in our space-time continuum, and while I'm not sure how to think about where it is other than in a "spiritual" realm, I am confident that it is a real place that really came into existence by the Word of Christ. It exists somewhere, and when the Angel left the earth in the OT, that is where he went. This seems to be what Isaiah necessitates. So, in the first place of special presence, you need to think of Jesus being in heaven.

This is true now that he has ascended as well. Jesus told his disciples, "I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" (John 14:2). And Peter says he "has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him." (1Pe 3:22).

One of the great problems that all Protestants have with the modern version of the Roman Mass is its insistence that when the elements are consecrated by the priest, they turn into the physical body of Jesus (Transubstantiation). But that means Jesus is now down here *physically*, rather than in heaven where the Bible tells us he is. As Calvin and others believed, that doesn't mean Christ can't be here *spiritually*

(for as the Word of God he is omnipresent). But the Lord Jesus took upon himself a human body, and this would seem to make his human body omnipresent, which would mean it isn't actually a human body. But I'm again getting ahead of myself.

Special Presence: Descending

The “where” question of Jesus gets more interesting. While the first place you are to think of him is in heaven, he himself told us, “No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man” (John 3:13). What is he talking about? The beginning of John is very important in this regard and most people misread it. John calls him “the light” (a term fairly similar to the glory). He says, “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world” (John 1:9). That's easy enough to understand. He is getting ready to tell the story of Jesus that he himself bore witness to.

But his very next words are, “He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him” (10). We raised this point in our “who” sermon, but with verse 12. Here is the fuller context of that verse.

What does it mean that he was coming into the world *but* he *was already in* (hence, the “where” question) *the world*? It means exactly what it says, so long as you don’t have a theological blindside that prevents you from seeing it.

We saw in the “what” question that Jesus was there in **the Garden of Eden** as the Prophet, Priest, and King because he became a man. John Frame explains why he was there. “The Garden was his temple, a place of his special presence, and [after their fall] he didn’t want Adam and Eve to be there any more.”⁷ Why was it the place of his special presence? We saw the answer in Isaiah and Frame confirms it here. **The Garden was his temple**. It was the holy place he created and put his priest-king Adam in to serve and to guard, to tend and to keep it.

Here, you need to learn a little about **two interrelated things**, and to get at them, you need to learn a little more about Eden. Eden is said to be a **garden**. When you look at the motifs God had Israel plaster and embroider and carve into the various parts of the tabernacle and temple, with its fruit symbolism, animal symbols, angel motifs, even tree and

⁷ John M. Frame, *The Collected Shorter Theological Writings* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008).

leaf ideas, he was having them represent in symbols the idea of the Garden of Eden.

But Eden is also said to be a “**mountain.**” “**You were in Eden, the garden of God ... You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God ... you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub**” (**Ezek 28:14-16**). Why does this matter? It is because throughout the Bible and seeping on into the dim but perverted memories of every pagan nation that has ever existed, God (gods) meet mankind on mountains. These holy mountains are essentially **links between heaven and earth**, meeting points, places of deliberation and communication between the two realms. And in all cases, they are viewed as sacred or holy, because this is where the temple of God resides (God can change the place of his temple if he so chooses). Thus, the garden-mountain ideas teach you in a very special way of the special presence of God.

Why did God come to Adam on **Mt. Eden**? Why in Jewish lore did the watchers descend upon **Mt. Hermon**? Why did he come to Noah on **Mt. Ararat**? Why did the people of Babel build something that looked like a mountain? Why

did he have Abraham go to the top of [Mt. Moriah](#)? Why did Jacob see a ziggurat-mountain at Bethel with angels going up and down on it and Christ standing at the top? Why did Moses have to go up onto [Mt. Sinai](#) to receive the law? Why did the people swear blessings and curses upon each other from the perches of [Mt. Ebal and Gerizim](#)? Why did Moses ascend to [Mt. Nebo](#) in his final moments? Why did the LORD choose [Mt. Zion](#) as the place where the temple should be put? Why did Elijah challenge the prophets of Baal from [Mt. Carmel](#)? Why does Jesus teach the sermon on the mount from [the Mountain of the Beatitudes](#)? Why does he go up to the [Mt. of Olives](#) to preach his great sermon the second coming, and why did he choose to ascend to heaven from that same place? Why is his cross staked to the ground on [Mt. Calvary](#)? Why is the proper translation of Armageddon, “[Mount of Assembly](#)?” Why is our own assembly right now called spiritual [Mt. Zion](#)? We’ve seen the answer. These are temples, holy places, place where holy men meet with God?

It is upon these places that the LORD gave instructions and commands, laws, sermons, and visions. From here he sent down power to destroy and grace to save. From them

he met and talked with his chosen servants. And he even sits enthroned on an ark on top of one.

On the other hand, **why is it that God placed Adam in a garden?** Why did **Esther's king's palace** have a garden? Why does the whole story of the **Song of Solomon** take place in a garden? Why is the **prophecy** that he would make Israel to once more be like the Garden of the LORD? Why was **Jesus' last night** spent praying in a garden and why was he then **buried the next day** in another one? Why are Christians said to have **access to the paradise of God**? And why are the last chapters of the Bible fixated on telling us about **the future garden** we will tend in eternity?

It is in these places that **the LORD walks** with someone gently, meets with his beloved, cries out in prayers of distress, has his dead body figuratively surrounded by flowers. It is where fruit and knowledge and life are found. Here our collective life began, and here it will end. The symbolism is different and yet the same kind of communion with God takes place in these gardens. For they are also meeting places where the heavenly and earthly intersect. These are the places where Jesus chooses to dwell.

Now, as I've said to some degree, both of these are considered temples. So we should probably think about **the tabernacle and temple** for just a moment. The tabernacle had designs that were revealed to Moses by God who commanded him very specifically, through multiple series of "7s" to make it all exactly according to the plans he had been given. The sevens bring our minds back to Genesis 1 and the creation of the original temples: earth and the Garden of Eden.

But Hebrews tells us that the tabernacle was a "copy" of the heavenly tent (**Heb 8:5**). As such, what it depicted was that heavenly reality. Hence, there must be no deviation from blueprints; the people must understand where Christ resides.

The tabernacle and temple (like all biblical temples) are **partitioned** out into **three sections**. You have a common space or **Courtyard** where people could come to offer sacrifices. You have the **Holy Place** where the priests would enter to change the wicks of the candles and offer incense and place the showbread. And you had the **Most Holy Place**. Here only the High priest could enter, and then only once a

year. For here is where the throne of Christ on earth resides—the ark of the covenant with its mercy seat and its Ten Commandments and its budding staff of Aaron and its jar of manna all surrounded by gold on the walls, glimmering and brilliant and perfect.

It is in this idea of a Most Holy Place, itself separated off by a veil that no one could pass, that we learn that God dwells in unapproachable majesty. This was evidenced to the Israelites by the Glory-cloud which would descend upon the place. This **Glory-cloud** is an image of the **special presence of the Holy Spirit** who would then deposit **its occupant inside the Most Holy Place**—the Angel of the LORD, who then spoke to Moses as a man speak to a man. And Moses beheld the “**form**” of the LORD (**Num 12:8**).

All of this taught an ancient Israelite something that I’m just not sure we appreciate enough. It taught them that while Christ did indeed come in special presence, **he came in a way that they could not have direct access to**. It had to be mediated by priests. It was walled off so that they could not enter. It was high up so that they could not ascend. One mountain (Mt. Sinai) shows this perfectly. When looked down upon from the top, it perfectly imitates the three tiers.

Only Moses could go to the top. 70 priests ascended the mid-slopes, but a form of early police-tape was placed at the bottom so that no Israelites could even cross the line, lest they be instantly put to death.

This idea of the special presence of the LORD as awesome and terrible, coming sometimes in judgment in these special appearances is important. In Eden, he kicked our parents out. In the flood, he killed the whole world. On Moriah, he almost had Abram take his sons life. At Sinai, the people wanted to die. At other times, when it was the Angel and they were not near the mountain, they often did. For [the Angelic body of Christ](#) was itself a special-presence that mediated the Second Person's bare essence to those few who were privileged to meet with him. The point being, because he took that form, he could go anywhere he wanted in this special presence. But still, it was on his terms, not theirs. They could only gain access when he granted it and where he decided to let them. This is the story, then, of the where of Christ who descended in the OT in ages long past.

God With Us

But there is a prophecy that predicted a great change. It was a change that was dimly understood, especially given that God was already with them in a special way (though, admittedly, there had been 400 years of silence in this regard).⁸ The prophecy is given by Isaiah, and we saw it when we looked at the “who” question. Now, we want to look at it with the “**where**” question in mind. The prophecy comes from Isaiah. “**Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel’ (which means, God with us)” (Matt 1:23; cf. Isa 7:14).**

The “**with us**” is really important for our “where” question, because it is a game-changer in *every* respect. In the OT, we might say that God was “**among**” them. He was specially present in space and time, but he was only in their midst. I’m not really sure how else to put it, though I don’t like that

⁸ **Going Deeper.** Many people are under the impression that because we call it the “400 years of silence” that during this entire time we have no writing at all from the Jews. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. This was actually the time when the Jews codified their Scripture, putting it into its final form. We also have more general writings of the Jews during this time than perhaps any other in the period in which the Bible was written. The 400 years of silence does not refer to the Jews not writing anything. It refers to God not coming to them in his special presence, via that Angel and Glory as he did so many times before and also after in the NT era.

language, because Zechariah predicts something similar to Isaiah when he says, “I will be the glory in her midst” (**Zech 2:5**). Whatever this “in her midst” thing meant, it had to mean something different than anything that had gone on in the past.

This is precisely where the context of **Immanuel** comes into play. How will God be with them? **In the womb of a virgin girl**. By definition, virgins cannot give birth, not because they do not have wombs, but because they do not have physical relations to make it possible. Yet, because she had a womb and was a woman, she was biologically able to bear, so long as a miracle took place. This is precisely what happened when the Holy Spirit overshadowed her, bringing about a conception infinitely greater than old Sarah’s or barren Hannah’s. This was itself **a special presence** of God, both in the Holy Spirit overshadowing to make Mary the most blessed of all women (**Luke 1:42**), and in the Son of God indwelling her womb in human flesh.

The important language John uses of the birth narrative is that he “**dwelt**” among us. The verb “to dwell” (*skenoo*) is used of Abraham pitching his **tent** (**Gen 13:12 LXX**). So you

could say that he “tented” among us. But there is a very special tent in the OT, it is called the tabernacle that we have already looked at. Amazingly, the verb can be “to tabernacle.” Jesus tabernacled among us. That isn’t really a word we use in English, so it isn’t usually translated that way. But it gets the point across much more poignantly than “dwelt.”

In saying it this way, we understand that **Jesus himself become the Holy Place where God’s special presence is mediated.** His flesh becomes his tent (this is language Paul uses of our human bodies; **2Co 5:1-4**). It is in this way, through incarnating, that God is now “with us.”

What does this mean? We’ve seen it in an earlier study on Jesus. “**That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands...**” (**1Jn 1:1**). In other words, this was **no secret** coming, no select coming, no private coming, no hidden coming, no veiled coming, no unseen coming, no mysterious coming. It was **public**, out in the open, walking and talking and eating and drinking with us. In saying that the Son of God became a man, you are answering much more than “who” question; you are answering the “what” question.

It was where? “In” his body Jesus did his ministry, for he is the “temple of God” (John 2:12). In his flesh he offered up prayers. In his physical form he performed miracles, cast out demons, taught the law, gave the gospel, predicted his sufferings and resurrection. This was now God with us. And the world has never seen a “where” like this before or since.

Descending Lower

There are a couple more “where’s” that we need to answer. Jesus as the Logos is eternal. But he manifested himself in the “where” of heavenly created space. He then descended to earth as the Angel of the LORD in the various places of his choosing. Finally, He came to us as one of us—God with us—here on earth walking around in the Promised Land. But this was not the end of his “where” mission.

There is an addition to the to the original Apostle’s Creed that is very controversial and is among the most asked questions I get. It says, “He descended into hell...” What does this mean? Could it possibly be true? The answer is, it is true, but only if you understand the original intent of the phrase.

You see, we have a problem, and it is especially an English problem. We translate at least three Greek words into only one English word. The three are *hades*, *Gehenna*, and *Tartarus*. The English word is “hell.” The way Jesus talks about hell is almost, if not entirely, negative. It is a place of outer darkness, of fire and sulfur, there the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. This is not a good place. Thus, when we hear “hell” we think the place of the damned, the place of punishment, the place of torment.

There is another problem when we hear this word. This time, it is a lack in our translation. You see, the word *hades* translates a Hebrew word in the LXX. This Hebrew word is *rarely associated* with those images of judgment but is instead simply known as the place of the dead. It is where all go in the OT, whether good or bad, saint or sinner (“**If I make my bed in Sheol [LXX: Hades] you are there!**” **Ps 139:8**). The word is *Sheol*. Sometimes our translations just transliterate it (I wish they would do that with the three Greek words!). Other times, they translate it as “**the dead**” or “**the pit**.” In the ESV, the NIV, the NAS and other popular translations, however, never once do they translate Sheol as hell (the KJV does sometimes). This creates much confusion.

You see, when the ancients talked about Jesus descending into hell, **they did not** mean that he went to the place of the damned **or** that he suffered God's judgment in hell-fire, **or** that he even went and preached that people suffering in hell-fire could have a second chance or something. **Nor**, as has become a popular Reformed alternative, did they mean that he was suffering the hellish forsaking of God on the cross while he was still alive (though, surely this is true). **Instead**, they simply meant that **he went to the place of the dead**. Jesus went to Sheol. Jesus went to Hades. Because that's where everyone goes when they die!

“But,” it is objected, **“Jesus told the thief on the cross that this day he would be with him in Paradise. Surely, therefore, Jesus did not go to the place of the dead.”** This is an answer from ignorance. The Parable of Lazarus shows quite clearly, and as the Jews and even Greeks thought of this place, **that Hades had different sections to it**. One section was a place of fire and judgment; what we normally think of as **hell**. Another section, much lower and deeper, was the place where the rebel angels were thrown in the days of the flood (in fact, both the Greeks and the Jews taught this); this is what Peter calls **Tartarus**. A third section was a

place of either blissful unawareness (for the Greeks; they called it [Elysium](#)), or a place called [Abraham's bosom](#), which you may think of as [paradise](#).⁹ Paradise! That's Garden language! And its right there in hades! How strange!

The idea of descending into hell has a second component to it, and it relates to prophecies in Psalm 68 and teachings in Ephesians 4, that when Jesus died, [he went to this place to proclaim his victory over the underworld keepers](#) of that place, and to then [release a host of captives](#) in his train, thereby emptying Paradise in Hades and filling paradise in heaven. You see, until Jesus paid the penalty for sin, even David and Abraham had to remain in that place. Though Abraham's bosom, it was still hell, and it was still a place of judgment for sinners. But it seems to me in God's grace, [he would not have his OT saints punished in hell-fire](#), all because he knew what he would come to do when he came to earth as one of us. And so, he designed the place to accommodate them too, even before Christ died. Thus, the descent

⁹ A Google search shows many 19th century authors who understood this (orthodox and not). For example, [Frederic Henry Hedge](#), *Sermons* (Roberts Brothers, 1891), 225; [Lucious Robinson Paige](#), *A Commentary on the New Testament* (Universalist Publishing House, 1894), 140, n. 23.

idea is really quite an important part of this “where” question.

Ascending into Heaven

As is the last part. For after Jesus did this, he came back to his human body in a **resurrection**. In this way, for 40 days, he **remained on earth** in a glorified body, as Luke says, “**Presenting himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God**” (**Acts 1:3**). But then, in an instant, the Lord Jesus left. Where he went we have already discussed. **He ascended back into heaven** and it is from this place that he will **return again to earth to judge the living and the dead**.

This judgment needs to be seen also as a where question. In the OT, Jesus was the king only *of Israel*. That was the “where” for most of its pages. But in the NT, because of his work, Jesus inherits *all the nations*. He is now the king of all, and every knee will bow at the Lord of all the earth. This is the new where that he earned as a man, that he had every right to as God.

This where question then becomes vitally important, because the stories of God in our Faith are **not some mythical ahistoric timeless principle or morals**. It is historical manifestations with real people down here on this earth in various places at various times. This is what we believe, and this is what all our creeds confess, and without them we are undone. For real people commit real sins, and a real parent committed a first sin in a real place at a real time on this planet. Those sins all needed to be atoned for here in space and time. That is what has happened in Jesus' coming here, and trusting it is true is the only way you will have eternal life.

Special Presence: In His People

It is tempting to think that the “where” question concludes at the ascension, with merely a long gap between it and the Second Coming. But I think it is both a theological and practical mistake to end it here. Let me tell you why in three concluding thoughts.

First, as someone has said, **“God’s special presence is closely related to His Word. God is especially present where**

He causes His Word to dwell.”¹⁰ We’ve seen this in the manifestation of the Second Person who is the Word of God. But the word of God can be understood in another way. That is, in what we are doing right now.

In a lengthy section of Romans, the Apostle defends his preaching ministry. Listen to the “where” part of these words. “But the righteousness based on faith says, ‘Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down) ‘or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)’” (Rom 10:6-7). Do you hear the ascending and descending, from heaven to the abyss? You do not need to do that. You do not need to try and lift yourself up to heaven through spiritual or mystical ladders of speculation or merit or out-of-body experiences. Jesus has already ascended, even as he already descended to earth and below that for your sins.

Continuing listening for the “where.” “But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we preach)” (8). Where is the word? He is there in the proclamation of the gospel. He is

¹⁰ Darrin Patrick and Mark DeVine, *Replant: How a Dying Church Can Grow Again* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2014).

there in the proclaimers' mouths and is there in the believer's heart. "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom 10:9).

This "word" is found throughout the Bible, from the first chapter to the last. "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:39-40). "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

Finishing this part of the "where" with something utterly mind-blowing, this leads to the special presence of Christ now. We alluded to it earlier in more than one way. Someone else writes, "God's special presence is in the place of worship. That knowledge ought to dictate what happens in that special place."¹¹ When God's people come together, they become the temple of Christ on earth, because they are attached to their Head in heaven as his body on earth. He is

¹¹ Michael P. V. Barrett, *The Beauty of Holiness: A Guide to Biblical Worship* (Greenville, South Carolina; Belfast, Northern Ireland: Ambassador International, 2006), 129.

the temple, thus we become his temple. And when we gather together, his special presence is among us.

This is true **especially through word and sacrament**, for these are the things that give us that gospel which saves and sanctifies. This is why most of the church has believed since the beginning that God's special presence is somehow in or near or with the elements of bread, wine, and water, even if we have disagreed on exactly how that is. This is why our Protestant fathers put so much emphasis on the proclamation of the word, on singing the word, and on praying the word corporately. It is because this is the special presence of God now.

That leads to **the other half of the temple equation of the body**. For it is not merely the corporate body, but the individual body that is God's temple. You see, all this happens because of the work of the Holy Spirit, who you must learn to think of as Christ's Spirit (**Rom 8:9; 1Pe 1:11**). If he is Christ's Spirit, then where the Spirit of Christ is, there Christ himself is, through him. As someone explains, "**The Fact of God's Special Presence in the Just. The Sending and the Bestowal of God the Holy Ghost; His Indwelling in the**

Soul.¹² The where now is that the Holy Spirit indwells his people; therefore Christ indwells his people. He is here, now, in us!

This means that the where question **directly impacts how you are to live.** As Paul puts it in just one application, “Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1Co 6:18-20). John Frame writes, “God’s special presence with the righteous is a blessing that entails his special providences in their earthly lives and his gift of eternal life. Therefore, to the righteous, God is ‘an ever-present help in trouble’ (Ps 46:1). The only way human beings can be righteous, of course, is through the grace of Jesus Christ. Those who are in Christ can never be separated from God’s love (Rom

¹² **Barthélemy Froget**, *The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Souls of the Just: According to the Teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Sydney A. Raemers (New York: The Paulist Press, 1921), xiii.

8:39; cf. Ps 16:11; John 14:23; Rom 8:9–10; 2Co 3:17).”¹³

Since,

God is especially present in the tabernacle. His special presence moves with the tabernacle. God is especially present with Moses on the mountain. God’s special presence is closely related to His Word. God is especially present where He causes His Word to dwell. The impending giving of the Law makes the ground on which Moses stands holy. God’s special presence coincides with His special speaking, and once this occurs, the location takes on permanent significance because, though He is present everywhere, He does not cause His word to dwell just everywhere. Thus the appropriateness of the urgent admonishment to seek Him “while he may be found” (Isa 55:6). Thus Jesus’s instruction to the newly healed man to go to the temple and show himself “to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them” (Matt 8:4).¹⁴

¹³ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, A Theology of Lordship (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 583.

¹⁴ Darrin Patrick and Mark DeVine, *Replant: How a Dying Church Can Grow Again* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2014).

Understand the movement of the special presence from heaven to earth to being in the midst of Israel to being with the people in the incarnation to now actually indwelling his people like he indwelt all those temples before. What a great encouragement this should be to your soul. What a blessing this “where” question, this oft neglected question, this question that when you think about it takes up more space in the Apostle’s Creed than any of the others¹⁵ can be, if you understand and cherish it.

¹⁵ What I’m thinking is this. There are traditionally 12 lines to the Creed, one for each Apostle whom tradition says each contributed their own line. Of those lines, half deal specially with Jesus. Of those six, only the first is entirely about the “who” question. “I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.” The rest, in one way or another, while answering some more “who” and some “what” and some “when,” focus perhaps more than anything on the “where.” We seen the conception “where” (He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit). He was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. From there he will come to judge...” In one way or another, all of these deal with the “where” question.