

We are the Living Temple of God

SCOTT HOEZEE

Today, if we hear the word *temple*, we would assume it refers to a place of worship where Jewish believers gather. It is actually pretty rare to run across a Christian congregation that has the word temple in its name, and yet, the temple is one of the most important themes in the whole Bible, and it is a key image in the New Testament for also the Church. Today on *Groundwork*, we will explore this amazingly rich image for the Church. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, this is the final program—the fifth of five programs—that we have been doing on New Testament images for the Church; and the New Testament does use a variety of images for the Church because no one image captures the fullness of the many-splendored thing that is the Church. So, we have seen the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the family of God, the house of God or household of God; and we saved probably the most amazing image for last, and that is the idea that the Church is the very temple of God.

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is right; and in fact, I just remembered this. Words of Hope, which is one of the sponsoring ministries behind *Groundwork*, along with ReFrame Media, was originally called Temple Time...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

And the idea was: Come to church; you know, listen in because this is God's temple. Today, you know, that generally conjures up images of some other kind of religion, but it is a rich theme throughout the Bible, Old Testament as well as New.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are going to really be racing along in this program because we are going to cover a lot of scripture from Genesis to Revelation by the time we are done, and lots of stops along the way. It can sound rather academic, but we will see by the end of this program that this notion of the Church as the temple, and each of us as temples of the Spirit, has rich, deep meaning for our lives and for our faith.

DAVE BAST

So, let's start in with Ephesians Chapter 2, a passage we have looked at repeatedly in this series, but we want to tag on a few extra verses beginning at verse 19: Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people, and also members of his household; ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone. ²¹In him, the whole building is joined together, and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²²And in him, you too are being built together

to become a dwelling place in which God lives by his Spirit.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there it is. We are collectively a temple, and we are individually temples of the Spirit, whose cornerstone is Christ; and Dave, we have noted this before on *Groundwork*, but the one verse from the Old Testament that gets quoted the most often in the New Testament is a verse you would never guess would be a candidate for that distinction, but it is from Psalm 118:22:

The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. ²³The Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes. ²⁴The Lord has done it this very day; let us rejoice and be glad.

There was something about that image of the rejected stone that ends up becoming the cornerstone that caught the apostles' attention, and they said: Huh; that is a perfect description for who Jesus is. He didn't look like much; he was rejected and scorned; despised; crucified; crossed out, literally, by the Romans; and he is the key after all.

DAVE BAST

Yes; in fact, Jesus himself quotes that verse and applies it to himself...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right.

DAVE BAST

So, yes; it caught his attention as well. So, that is starting us on this idea...this whole idea of a temple; but before that comes a tent that we will talk about, and even before that, if you want to ask where the idea of temple begins in scripture, you have to go all the way back to the beginning, don't you?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; scholars have noticed just in fairly recent times that if you step back and look at the Genesis 1 creation account...you cannot get farther back in the Bible than Genesis 1...and you see the structure of those six days of creation, and then the climax of a seventh day of Sabbath, what you see is that God was constructing a temple. He was constructing a temple, in which he himself intended to dwell inside of that temple with his creatures...particularly with his image bearers...that is what is going on already in Genesis 1. God is constructing a temple. Unfortunately, of course, soon into the story, sin comes. Adam and Eve go with the advice of the tempter—of Satan. They fall and they are evicted from the temple. So, now God starts to say: All right; that didn't work out, but I want to keep moving gradually, closer and closer, back to my original intention of a creation as temple in which I can live with my creatures.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; so, you could say that the whole drama of the Bible is the story of how God is going to rebuild the temple...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

Where he can dwell with his redeemed creation...his renewed creation...and people who have been brought back into a relationship with him. So, almost the first thing that he does when he brings his people out of slavery in Egypt and is pointing them toward the Promised Land, is he gives instructions to them for how to worship him and how to put a tabernacle for him in the middle of the camp...right in the middle of the camp...as a symbol that he is once more with his people.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is a portable tent so they can set it up and take it down as they move; but in the Bible, it is not that Exodus just comes after Genesis. What we sometimes miss is that Exodus is the direct sequel to Genesis, and at the

end of Exodus, in Chapter 40, we get this:

³⁴Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. ³⁵Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

So, what this is, Dave, is an undoing...a first initial step of an undoing of what happened when Adam and Eve got exiled from Eden. They got exiled from the temple. God couldn't live with them anymore, but now he has taken a big step to living in the midst of his people again through that tent—the tabernacle there in the wilderness.

DAVE BAST

And outside the tent, of course, there is an altar where sacrifices are made, pointing to the truth that ultimately God will provide a sacrifice that will purify his people from sin, and achieve atonement; but then, as they settle in the land, and we read further into the Old Testament, the king settles in Jerusalem—David is established there. He wants to build a house for God. You know, we don't need a tent anymore; we're here now. I want to build you a house; and God says: Well, you know, that is a great idea, but I am not going to have you do it. I will let your son build the house. So, Solomon builds a magnificent temple, and we read, interestingly, this from 1 Kings Chapter 8:

¹⁰As the priests withdrew from the holy place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord; ¹¹and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled his temple.

So, there it is again; that glory symbolizing God's presence—the *shekinah*—the cloud. It fills the temple as it had the tabernacle.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; then Solomon says something that he wanted to be true, and that we would want to be true, but that we will see in the next segment, didn't stay true. ¹²Solomon said, "The Lord has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud. ¹³I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, O God. A place for you to dwell forever." That is the vision, that God will forever dwell in the temple there in Jerusalem; and indeed, that is getting back to God's goal; so, the temple of Eden didn't work out, so then he had the tabernacle—the tent in the wilderness and filled with his glory—now he has moved into a more permanent structure of the temple, which is not a portable tent anymore; it is much more magnificent; and God is going to live here forever, Solomon said. It didn't quite work out that way.

DAVE BAST

No.

SCOTT HOEZEE

God is going to have to do something else to get back to his goal; and we are going to start looking at what that looks like in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, we have just seen that the idea of a temple in which God will be able to dwell in the midst of his people, that is a major motif in the Old Testament, and we just read from 1 Kings 8, where Solomon said that he had built God a temple where he would live forever...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It didn't quite work out that way.

DAVE BAST

It didn't. In the last program, we talked about the house rules for the people of God; this is how you live. Tragically, the people of Israel forgot that important truth, because they came to rely on the temple as a sort of a magical place, which insured they could live however they wanted, and God would never destroy them because his temple was there; and Jeremiah in particular tried to warn them: Don't say: the temple, the temple, the temple, because while you are going on about your lives of cruelty and avarice and greed and injustice, God is going to deal with that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; Jesus even quoted that later: You have turned the temple into a den of robbers. Jesus says that when he cleanses the temple in the New Testament. By that he means: You've turned this into the place where crooks go to hide out from the cops. You think that you can just commit bank robbery during the week and then hide out in the temple on Sunday; you have made this into a den of robbers. Not the idea; and there are consequences for going after other gods. As we said in the program on the bride of Christ, they became an adulterous people.

DAVE BAST

Yes; so, the temple is not going to save them; and in fact, in the prophet of the exile, Jeremiah is the prophet who comes just before the exile and sort of issues the final warnings. Ezekiel is the prophet during the exile, and he sees an amazing vision in Ezekiel 11:

²²Then the cherubim with the wheels beside them spread their wings, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.

The idea was that God actually dwelt above the cherubim in the Holy of Holies in the temple.

Ezekiel says:

²³The glory of the Lord went up from within the city and stopped above the mountain east of it.

So, it leaves!

SCOTT HOEZEE

This is tragic...so, we said in the first segment that Exodus 40, when God comes down and his glory fills the tabernacle, Ezekiel 11 is like running that tape backwards. Now Ezekiel sees that glory of the Lord lifting up out of the temple, and God heads for the hills, quite literally. God's glory has departed from Israel, and this is a tragic, tragic thing. Ezekiel, though, will eventually, along with some of the other prophets say: But the day will come when God's glory will return to God's people. It is going to happen; and then the question became: Well, when? So, eventually Herod builds a temple in Jerusalem. He rebuilds the temple in Jerusalem. This is the temple that was in Jerusalem when Jesus was on this earth. A lot of people thought: Oh, maybe that is it. Maybe that's it. But the truth is, God's glory never descended on that temple...

DAVE BAST

No.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Not like he did in 1 Kings 8, or in Exodus 40; and that temple eventually is destroyed in 70 AD.

DAVE BAST

But the Gospel of John, the fourth Gospel in particular, gives us a clear clue as to God's ultimate purpose in this whole business of temple; and it happens early on in a way that you might not quite catch from the English translations of a famous verse in John's prologue—John 1:14:

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only Son of the Father.

So, there is the glory, but that verb translated: The Word dwelt among us, literally is the word “pitched his tent among us.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; *sk?n?*—*sk?noo*—which is the Greek word for tent; and of course, that leads you right back to Exodus 40, Jesus tabernacled among us. He is now the living tabernacle; and we have seen his glory, John says. So, all the dots are getting connected up here by John; because, indeed, by the time John wrote his gospel...and we think John was the last gospel to be written...the temple in Jerusalem was gone; and so, even people who did believe in Jesus as the Messiah were scandalized by that: Where is the temple? There is no more temple. How can there be no temple; and John wants to say right from the get-go: Fear not—fret not—the temple is Jesus.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The dwelling place of God among his people is Jesus himself.

DAVE BAST

In fact, John will make this quite explicit in the next chapter, Chapter 2, where Jesus cleanses the temple, and that has often puzzled Bible readers and biblical commentators and scholars because in the other Gospels Jesus cleanses the temple just before his crucifixion...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; right after Palm Sunday.

DAVE BAST

Right; during Holy Week; and you alluded to the story. It is not a den of robbers. You have turned it into a den of robbers. It is supposed to be a house of prayer for the people; but John moves it into Chapter 2, at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry...did he do it twice? That doesn’t seem really logical. The fact is, most scholars believe that John rearranged this for theological reasons, because he wanted, right from the start, to help us understand this business about the temple. So John says:

¹⁸“What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this? (In other words, to throw out the moneychangers.)

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

¹⁹Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.” ²⁰They replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple,” (They took him literally) “and you are going to raise it in three days?” ²¹But the temple he had spoken of was his body.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So, there it is explicitly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; John has to move that up to the front of his gospel because the absence of a temple was the crisis of his day; so he has got to move the cleansing of the temple up for thematic reasons; and Jesus is explicitly the temple; and then, of course, Jesus’ ministry goes on. His body is crucified but raised again; but then he

ascends to the Father, and the apostles kind of wondered; Okay, well so he was the temple, but now he is gone again. But then they started to connect the dots biblically, and by the time you get to 1 Corinthians 6, Paul writes:

¹⁹Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own. ²⁰You were bought with a price; therefore, honor God with your bodies. So now, we see that each of us individually are mini temples...mini tabernacles...full of the glory of God, even as collectively the Church also makes up a temple of God. So now, you know, again, if God's goal from Genesis on was to dwell in the midst of his people, Pentecost was a major move in that direction, by now dwelling in each of us as temples of God's Spirit.

DAVE BAST

The great question is: Where is the temple of God now? There is no building. Where do we meet God? Where do we find God? Where does God's glory reside? Where can God be worshipped? The answer in the New Testament initially was: Well, it is found in Jesus. Wherever Jesus' body went, God's glory was there...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, right.

DAVE BAST

That is where you worship; but now, what do we do? Well now, the Spirit has come and it makes sense, I think, of another sort of cryptic thing Jesus said in the Gospel of John, in John Chapter 4: verse 21 paraphrased The hour is coming, and is now here, when you are not going to worship God in the mountain of the Samaritans, or even in Jerusalem, where that building is, ²³but those who worship God will worship him in spirit and in truth. Now we worship God in the power of the Spirit, through the Person of Jesus, who is the truth, and we offer our worship. So, it is found...*he* is found...in the Church.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so, that is a key image that comes up again in 1 Peter 2, which quotes Psalm 118, again: ⁴You come to him, the living stone, rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him. ⁵You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering acceptable spiritual sacrifices through Jesus Christ. ⁹You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation; God's special possession. So, there it is. Individually we are temples of the Holy Spirit, collectively we are the temple of God in this creation. This is just such an important image, Dave; and its got a lot of practical applications for us; and as we close out this program and series, we will take that up in the next segment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and today we are wrapping up a series on images of the Church in the Bible. The Church as the temple of God, so each of us is a mini temple filled with the Holy Spirit, called to holiness of life. Collectively, the Church is the temple of God—the dwelling place of God—and the place where his glory now is found, and where he can be worshipped, through Jesus by the power of the Spirit.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; but what is interesting, Dave, is that even in the New Testament, what you find in Paul and Peter, in those passages we read from 1 Corinthians 6 and from 1 Peter 2, is that Paul and Peter have to keep reminding the people of this truth. They kind of keep forgetting. Do you not know, Paul says to the Corinthians, that you are the temple of the Holy Spirit? Don't you remember who you are? And Peter also has to keep drilling this into people because we forget; and I think, Dave, even today we can understand why we forget this truth, because the Church doesn't often look like a holy temple of the Holy Spirit. It is pretty easy just to see the Church as a collection of people, some of whom we like, some of whom frankly we don't like, some of whom we would never choose to be a friend of ours, and yet they are our brother and sister in

Christ. The Church doesn't always, just looking at it, make you say: Ah, yes, yes; this is the place where the Holy Spirit dwells. You can tell.

DAVE BAST

Yes; isn't that the truth; because when we think of the Church in the concrete, not in the abstract, what we have is a collection of broken, sinful, needy people often—we all are—far from the kind of place where...you think of Jacob, you know, having his dream in the book of Genesis, and he wakes up in awe and says: God is in this place. I wonder how often that is the reaction of people when they come into our worship service? God is in this place; but that could be, and should be what the Church is.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and at our best we are, and there are those times when we sense that; but there are also all those other times where, you know, the church is a group of people, some of whom love all the new songs and some just say: No, we have just got to sing *Great is Thy Faithfulness* and the old standards. It is a place where, you know, rifts open up over the color of the new carpeting in the sanctuary, or arguments about: Should we let neighborhood kids play basketball in the fellowship hall during the week? So, you kind of look at all of that and you say: Holy, glorious, filled with the presence of the Spirit? On the average Sunday morning when the choir's anthem fizzled and there is a congregational meeting that gets a little cantankerous about the church budget, you can miss it; and so, we need Paul and Peter, and we need as pastors and leaders today to do exactly what Paul and Peter did. We have just got to keep reminding ourselves of who we are. We *are* a holy people, we *are* the temples of the Holy Spirit, and we are collectively that place where God wants to dwell with his people; which was, again, the goal of Genesis 1, and it is the goal of getting back to that throughout the whole rest of the Bible; and we have been making stops in Exodus, and in Kings, and in Ezekiel, and in John. That is the goal, and we just need to be reminded of this; and fall back in a little bit of awe and wonder that God does manage to do this despite all of our foibles and flaws.

DAVE BAST

You know, it strikes me, Scott, that we could say the same thing about ourselves as individuals. We have been making that point...individuals as temples...the Church collectively as a temple; but none of us is what we should be. We could all look at ourselves and see the places where we fail...where we stumble...where God's work isn't finished; and maybe we are tempted to wonder: Can this even be true? Do I really have God living within, with his power? Why haven't I changed more? But, God is at work, and by faith we hold onto both those truths; both in ourselves individually, and in his Church, God is at work. Maybe he is working according to his time table. We would like it to be a little bit more rapid. We would like to see a little more progress; but let's hold onto this wonderful truth that he has made it possible...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

For he, the holy God, to live with us as sinful, broken, people; we are on the mend. Our Church is on the mend, and we can move forward in that confidence.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is also why we have to heed the Apostle Paul in places like Corinthians, where he says repeatedly: This is who you are, now act like it. This is your identity; you are hidden in Christ; you have union with Christ; you are part of the body of Christ; you are the bride of Christ; the family; the household of God; all the images that we have looked at in this series. So, by reminding you of that, now I am calling on you to act like it. You are a temple of the Holy Spirit, act like it. Don't defile your body with sexual immorality. Don't act terribly; act like you believe the Spirit is in you.

As you said, Dave, we are on the mend...we are on a journey, and we are headed toward where the Bible ends...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We started in Genesis 1, let's go to Revelation 21.

DAVE BAST

Yes; this is where we are going. John writes: I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ²I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband, ³and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look, God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. ²²I did not see a temple in the city because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

DAVE BAST

And that's where we are headed.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That's where we are headed. It loops right back. The Bible is such an incredible unity. We started in Genesis 1 with God trying to build a temple, and now at the end he reestablishes his temple, and he will live with us forever and ever, thanks be to God.

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

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