

Approaching the Holy: From Tabernacle to Temple of the Heart

Bible Verses Mentioned: Hebrews 7:22-27, Exodus 3:1-15, Matthew 27:51, 1 Corinthians 3:16

Pray with me. Father, we thank You for the gift of Your Word. I pray that You would open the eyes of our heart and that we would be able to see You more clearly. We would understand more deeply who You are and the revelation of You, Jesus, and that our hearts will be transformed into Your likeness. We thank You, Lord. We pray this in Your holy name. Amen. Have a seat.

Good morning, everybody. It's good to see you. Hey, my brother's here. What's up, man? Awesome. So we're in the middle of a series on the Book of Hebrews, and we've been talking about what it means to worship. And what does it mean as a heart posture, as God's people to worship Him? What does it mean to move in worthy ways? And when you take the lid off that topic, it seems kind of simple.

But the deeper you get into it, you realize it's a little complicated theologically sometimes. It can feel that way. And personally, the other day I was at Ortega Gardens. And for those of you that don't know what Ortega Gardens is, it's a facility, it's a memory care facility just around the corner. It's for people that are wrestling with dementia or Alzheimer's or in some stage of that disease. And this visit for me was especially poignant because we recently checked my father in to Ortega Gardens.

And one of the things at St. Mark's that we do is that we bring communion once a month to Ortega Gardens. It's a beautiful thing, and it's something that we've done for a while now. And this particular week, I was going, I'd never done this before. And to be quite honest with you, I was walking in there and I was a little nervous. Not because my father was there, but I just didn't know how this was going to go. How do you do this in a place like Ortega Gardens?

So when I arrived, I stepped to the front and there were two women that were sitting there with giant smiles on their face. And as you can imagine, people are there in various stages of this disease. And the two women up front were sitting there. One had a giant smile on her face. I said, "Hey, how you doing?" I said, "Mom, I'm Billy. What's your name?" And she looked up to me and smiled, and she just goes, "She couldn't remember her name." I said, "It's okay." So I stopped and I began to lead the service and I took my guitar out and I slung it over my shoulder and I began to sing "Amazing Grace." And every face in the room looked up and they knew every single word.

And I said, "Pray with me, our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be every single word." And when I began to offer communion, the hands went up. And those that were Roman Catholics, they opened their mouth to receive the Eucharist. They knew everything that was going on. Their hearts from years of marinating in God's Word and marinating in the liturgies of our church and marinating in the Scriptures and worshipping together, their hearts were inscripturated.

But I couldn't help the sense as I was standing there that I felt they were being led. They were being pulled along by what they knew, but also who they knew. I got in my car to go home, and I closed my door, and I bowed my head, and I wept. And I looked to the Lord and I said, "I am an idiot." And that's not the word I use, though.

How much time in my life as a priest do I spend worrying about is a sermon right? Am I going to get the music right? Am I moving the right direction? Am I doing this? Or how is this presenting? Ugh. But how much time even more? Deeper still as a worshiper, not as a priest, but just as a Christian, as a worshiper. Do I think, "Am I doing this right? I want it to feel a certain way.

I want to be moved in a certain way. I want God to hit me between the eyes in a certain way. I need to be fed in a certain way. I need it to feel right. Me, me, me, me." That's gross. And something I've noticed over the years because I've spent a lot of time on this track. When I turn my focus towards myself like that, I shrink the story.

I shrink the gospel story. God always becomes smaller. He becomes less holy. He becomes less astonishing. And at the same time, when he becomes smaller, he seems to become more distant and my worship becomes flat. And then when I pray the way it feels to me, it's like taking a flat tennis ball and throwing it against the ceiling. It just kind of pop, pop, pop. My prayers just land back at my feet.

So what? No one hears me, and my faith becomes flat, and then I get anxious. But like I said, I've been around this track enough, and I've been to that place enough times to know every other religion in the world, and I mean every other religion in the world. Every time you make God bigger, to make God bigger means that you are making Him more distant.

And also in every other religion in the world, to make God more intimate means you are making Him smaller and less powerful. But the good news that we have in Jesus and the cure for this worship insomnia that we get is that we need to make the story simultaneously bigger and more intimate at the same time. And that is what we are offered in Christ.

That we get a story that surpasses, that is transcendent, that is beyond anything that we can digest, that we can comprehend, but it is also more intimate on a cellular level that flows into the nooks and crannies of my story in a way that I could never comprehend. Hebrews 7, what we just read this passage earlier, it paints a great picture of this, and I want to unpack it. So let me reread the first couple of verses here. Verse 22, it starts like this, talking about Jesus.

This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. The former priests were many in number because they were prevented by death for continuing in office, but he holds a priesthood permanently because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. Now this is a powerful verse, right?

Agreed? But see, as 21st century Americans, we hear the punchline of a joke. And it's a really good punchline. Like Jesus stands before the throne of God on our behalf. But this joke, this joke is always better when you hear the first part. And so what I want to do is I want to rewind a little bit and tell you a little bit of the pre-roll to this of what Jesus is doing so we can digest what this passage is actually telling us.

So what's happening here in the book of Exodus, to go back to the way of beginning, God reveals Himself to Moses and He says, "I'm going to save the people. I've heard their cry." So he appears in the burning bush. He leads them out of captivity. He leaves them with a pillar of fire, a pillar of smoke. He's going across the desert. Why did he do that? Because he's a good and holy God. And those were His people, but He wanted to be with them. It's simple.

He wanted to pull His people out because He wanted to be with them. But He had a problem. And the problem was this. He was a holy God, an infinitely holy God, eternally holy, and they were not a holy people just like us. And the problem wasn't just that God didn't want to be around unholy things, though that certainly can be true. The problem was that unholy things could not come into the presence of God and survive.

It says that no one has ever looked and seen the face of God and lived. You remember that story where Moses hides in the cleft of the rock? He said, "God, show me. Show me yourself." He says, "No, I can't, man. You won't make it." So he hides him in the cleft of the rock and then God's shadow passes over Moses. And he can't even look at it. And it's so powerful that Moses is like a glow stick for weeks, right? That's what we're talking about.

So no person could come into the presence of God, but God said there's a way. I want to be with you, and there's a way for me to allow you to be present with you, but also to insulate you from the raw magnitude of my holiness. And what I'm going to do is I'm going to give you instruct you. I'm going to teach you how to build a tabernacle. And this thing, also known as the tent of meeting, it was a mobile temple. It was a mobile temple. They would put the center of their camp, but it had to be constructed in a very, very specific way.

It had to be sewn together with specific thread using specific cloth cut to specific lengths held up by a type of specific wood that was carved at specific lengths to be this container that was totally uncontaminated, ceremonially clean, with these series of areas divided by massive curtains that would each get increasingly holy till you came to the center, which was called the Holy of Holies.

You've heard this expression before? The Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies, it was no joke. Exodus 40 says, "This is where the presence of the Lord came down and dwelled in the temple. It's where the Ark of the Covenant was. It's where God's presence dwelled. And the best way that I can describe this is that the Holy of Holies was a nuclear reactor of God's holiness.

And only the high priest could enter at a certain time of year dressed a certain way after spending days preparing himself and cleansing himself and bathing, wearing the right thing, bringing the right sacrifice. And this was built so that the priests would enter, they would enter barefoot and backwards. And Jewish folklore had it that they would tie a rope around the waist of the high priest when he went in.

Because if somebody died inside, they had no way to get him out. They would just track him out. In Leviticus 10, just to give you an example, Leviticus 10, there were two brothers, Nadab and Abihu, names that are not popular anymore. But Nadab and Abihu. And they were the sons of Aaron. And God had just revealed Himself in the temple the night before, and they were hanging out and the Scripture implies that they were drinking a little bit. And their thought was, "Wait until God sees us. He loves us.

Let's go see Him." So they brought this offering unauthorized fire, it says, which means they went in the wrong people at the wrong time, in the wrong way, with the wrong sacrifice. And guess what? A fireball incinerated them at the door

of the Holy of Holies. And one of the funniest parts of Scripture is the next chapter is when you see everybody gathering around saying, "I'm not going in to get them. You get them." But I'm painting a picture here.

It was in the Holy of Holies where this endless line of sacrifices was made, where bulls and goats and sheep were offered up. But none of those things ever offered forgiveness of sins. Those things were placeholders. They were a placeholder for an ultimate sacrifice that would be offered an unblemished lamb that was one day going to be sacrificed, a lamb that would take away the sins of the world. And we know who that lamb was. It was Jesus and it was His sacrifice on the cross.

And when He did that, when He died on the cross, there was a formal temple that had been built at this point. Matthew 27:51 says the temple curtain, the temple curtain, the permanent curtain that blocked the Holy Holies was torn in half from the top to the bottom. Now, what does that mean? Now you got to keep this in mind. That temple curtain was 60 feet tall, 30 feet wide. It was four inches thick.

And that little detail where it says it was torn from the top to the bottom. The reason they tell that detail in there is it says that God tore it from the top to the bottom. Because if it had torn from the bottom up, it would imply that humanity could have intervened and done that. The barrier between God and humanity was gone. And at that moment, at that moment, the earth shook. The sky became dark.

Graves were torn open as the holiness of God, the same holiness that incinerated Adab and Nadab and Abihu, the same holiness that Moses couldn't come in the presence of that no one could touch. That holiness spilled beyond the walls of the temple into the world. And it took residence in a new temple. A new temple that had just been washed clean. A new container that was now a holy space. What was that container?

You, me, our hearts. 1 Corinthians 3:16, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you?" If I said that to an ancient Jewish person, they would have no category for what I was talking about. Their heads would explode.

You see, the story gets bigger, cosmic explosion of God's holiness, but it gets more intimate that God's Spirit dwells in our heart. I took a long way around the barn to talk about this Hebrew seven passage. But here is Jesus, the ultimate high priest, and He's standing before the throne. But this time, He has no need like those other high priests to offer sacrifices daily for His own sins or for those of His people.

Since He did this once and for all, happened once. He did it on the cross. He doesn't have to do this anymore when He offered Himself up. So what's He do now? He intercedes. His job is to intercede. And what does that mean? What that is saying is that Jesus is pleading before the throne. Here's what He is not saying before the throne. He is not pleading, "God, have mercy on them." He's not saying, "Don't punish them."

"They're really nice. I love them a lot. Please just have them." He's not saying what he's saying. He's holding up an invoice. He's saying, "This is what was owed. This was the price they paid, the price of death, and it has been paid. And it is marked paid in my own blood. And I've kept the receipts, the scars in His hands. You ever wonder why Jesus was raised with scars in His hands? That's why. It's to show that as He stands before the throne, the price is paid."

It says He saved us to the uttermost. And this indwelling Spirit of God that we now have has changed our spiritual DNA. It's changed my spiritual DNA. And for those who are filled with the Spirit of God, we can draw near to the throne of God and worship in prayer because we are now children of God. Amen. There's this great photo from years ago, John F. Kennedy. It was in the early '60s. You know, he's an exorbitantly popular.

It was a month before he was assassinated. And this photo of him was on the cover of Life magazine. And he's sitting at the Oval Office reading a paper. And it's in this Oval Office at this desk where he navigated the Cuban Missile Crisis. It's where the missile codes were. It's in that Oval Office sitting at that desk that he negotiated in the Civil Rights Movement. It's in that Oval Office that every major that we plotted the moon landing.

But in that photo, everyone's eyes are blind to all those realities because what everybody's staring at in that photo is at the base of his desk is a little door that's open. And sitting there at his feet is a little two-year-old boy, John F. Kennedy Jr., sitting at his dad's feet. See, there's a powerful story, but there is a bigger story in that.

It's the story of the powerful office, but there's an intimate story there of the love of a father, the freedom of a child that can walk in and sit at the nexus of this power. Literally, none of you, not me, not you, could do what that little boy did. If I went in there, I would be led away in handcuffs if I tried to sit at his feet, right? But this little boy, he was a child in the presence of his father's power. And guess what?

When you're a child in the presence of your father's power, guess what? Childhood always wins. It doesn't diminish the magnitude of the Father's power. It underscores the magnitude of His love and this child's freedom. That is us. When we walk into the Holy of Holies with the indwelling Spirit of God, we are children of God, sons of God, that we are adopted and we see God's power through the lens of our belovedness.

That power doesn't become scary anymore. It doesn't become scary. That power becomes our security. It becomes a thing that we know is on our side. It's our guarantee that we can now do the unthinkable, that we can approach God. And it keeps going. It says that Jesus is interceding for us. It means that, yes, he's declaring the finished work of the cross, but it also means this, and I'm going to wrap up with this.

It means that He is gathering the prayers of His people, and He's bringing Him to the Lord, bringing Him to the Father, and He's laying Him at His feet. God hears and He mobilizes John 15, "My Father is always at work." What's he at work doing? Romans 8, working all things together for the good of those who love Him. It says in Romans 8, also it says that the Holy Spirit is moving in your heart. And guess what?

It's praying the groanings of your Spirit. Those things so deep that you don't even know, you can't even wrap words around it and it's pulling it forth that his mighty power is at work. Why does that matter to us? What matters because when your prayers feel like they're falling flat, when you are crying out to the Lord for the 10,000th time, where are you? Why aren't you moving?

Do you even care? It means when you get to the point on your journey where your brain quits working and you can't remember your own name. It means that the Holy Spirit is wrapping words around the things that you can't even understand. Jesus is gathering our prayers and He's whispering them into the ear of the powerful Father, the one who calls you His beloved, the one at whose feet you sit.

And you can rest knowing that He is on the move. There's nothing that He should be doing that He's not doing. He loves you. He has you and He will never let go ever. Amen.