

OPENING STORY:

Throughout my childhood and teen years, my dad was a youth minister. From age 4-12, we lived in Stillwater, OK (Go Pokes!) but after my 6th grade year, we moved to Kansas City. That's where I spent what I would consider my formative years - jr high and high school. I grew in the things that I liked and formed life long relationships. I got involved in football and youth group. I made many mistakes along the way, but they were great years! But going into my senior year, something happened that I wasn't expecting - my dad got a job offer to preach in Grand Prairie, Texas. After going through the process, him and my mom decided to take the offer, but they did something unexpected - they agreed that my dad would go down for the year and my mom and I would stay in KC so I could finish my senior year of high school. This was a surprise, but one that I was grateful for.

As time went on, my mom and I experienced the sadness of him being gone. During the week, our interactions with him were limited to phone calls and facetime's. He made a concerted effort to come most weekends to my football games and to be with us. That was a blessings. And in the ebb and flow of him coming and going, my mom and I shared a commonality - we just wanted to be in his presence. There is something about being in the presence of someone who knows you and chooses to love you that is unlike anything else. And there were times when I was living in the house with my whole family that I became numb to that presence. Not that I didn't care about my family, but I didn't feel the full weight of the value of being with them. Of them being with me. Of us journeying together.

You see, through this time I got to tangibly feel my father's love for me... and my love grew for him.

Today, we are going to examine our God's desire to be with us. As we continue to go through our series Immanuel, we will explore the relationship that God has with his people, with us. The heart of God is to be with us, to journey with us and to be close to us. My prayer is that we see Him for who He is and that draws us close to Him. Let's pray.

TABERNACLE:

My goal today is to show you the heart of God for His people through a tent called the Tabernacle, a building called the Temple, and a man named Jesus. We will pick up the story with a man named Moses and a group of people named the Israelites. Now they had been enslaved by the nation of Egypt and through their crying out to the LORD, God sent Moses and his brother, Aaron, to rescue them. God saves the Israelites and through some crazy situations, they gain their freedom and begin to travel through the wilderness. I want you to go there with me for a second:

Imagine the fear radiating through your body as you think of the possible pursuit of the Egyptians.

Smell the countryside air that is free from smoke of civilization.

Understand the simultaneous sense of freedom, while being one of millions of Israelites traveling crowded together, wondering what is next.

There would've been major aspects of this that were terrifying. We can't begin to fully imagine what these people were feeling - joy and terror. And then God tangibly shows up. Exodus 13:21-22 says,

"And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people."

God was not going to leave the Israelites or forsake them. They were, and are, His people. He leads them in a tangible way - through a cloud and through fire! He knew the things that they were thinking, hopeful of and fearful of. In the midst of this, He wanted the Israelites to see that He was with them.

This pillar of cloud and fire would lead the Israelites through the Red Sea, away from the Egyptian pursuers. It would lead them through the wilderness. It would lead them to a place called Mount Sinai. And there, God would take yet another step to be with them - by commissioning a tent called the Tabernacle and the things that would make it significant.

The word *tabernacle* is a translation of the Hebrew *mishkan*, which means "dwelling-place." The tent was divided into two rooms: the Holy Place, where the table of showbread, the golden lampstand, and the altar of incense sat; and the Holy of Holies, where the [Ark of the Covenant](#) was placed. All of these things were significant, but none more significant than the Ark of the Covenant, which is where God Himself dwelt.

This elaborate plan for the Tabernacle was given to Moses by God... but what was the purpose? The purpose of the tabernacle of Moses was to provide a place where the people could properly worship God. Priests sacrificed animals on the altar in the outer court. The bread of the presence, the continually burning lampstand, and the offering of incense were all in the Holy Place; but only once a year, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies as part of the ceremony of the Day of Atonement.

God very clearly wanted to be with His people, but His presence was dangerous to the sinful people of Israel. What do I mean by dangerous? I mean that God in the fullness of His holiness was dangerous to the people of God. They couldn't handle it. Two stories highlight this:

1. Moses wanted to see God but God, in His infinite wisdom, only allowed Moses to see the backside of Him. This would radiate Moses' face for days to come.
2. In Exodus 19:12 God tells Moses that the people of Israel cannot touch the mountain that He is residing on (before the tabernacle) or they will die.

Our sin separates us from God. It makes His presence dangerous to us. In fact, we can't exist in His presence as sinful people. Now the spoiler alert is that we have now been able to be in His presence because of Jesus Christ... and we will get to that. But God got as close to His people as was safe.

This Tabernacle would continue to be transported in reverence with the Israelites - God would not leave His people. This shows His heart for those He loves, His distinction from the Egyptian gods that the Israelites had been surrounded with - God loves His people and shows it through existing among them... even if there is still a barrier between full intimacy. But God has a plan - He always has.

THE TEMPLE:

Eventually over time, a man named King David, who was considered a man after God's own heart, would ask an important question about the Tabernacle:

"Behold, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the Lord is under a tent." -1 Chronicles 17:1b

A valid question, David! Why does God dwell in a tent while men dwell in homes of cedar? Surely God is worthy of an upgrade, right? King David was a man of war, so God did not permit him to build the

Temple - however, God commissioned David's son, Solomon, to do just that. In 1 Chronicles 22:6-10, we see this:

"Then he called for Solomon his son and charged him to build a house for the Lord, the God of Israel. David said to Solomon, "My son, I had it in my heart to build a house to the name of the Lord my God. But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'You have shed much blood and have waged great wars. You shall not build a house to my name, because you have shed so much blood before me on the earth. Behold, a son shall be born to you who shall be a man of rest. I will give him rest from all his surrounding enemies. For his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for my name. He shall be my son, and I will be his father, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever.'"

And through Solomon, a temple is built! And it is magnificent. The tabernacle is changed to the Temple. God continues to dwell among His people. And the Holy of Holies is separated from the rest of the Temple by a large veil - one that could never be torn by human hands. The Temple becomes the central place of worship and sacrifice for the people of Israel. God is still with His people... and His presence is still dangerous to those in sin; yet, His heart remains to be with them. He is among them. He is central to their lives. They continue to stand out to those around them as special, set apart, and chosen. Unlike the other "gods" of the world, our God was truly choosing to be with His people... in all realness.

THE SON OF GOD:

Time continues to progress. The Israelites experience captivity and destruction from surrounding nations - and at one point the Temple is even destroyed. But God is faithful and always has a plan to be with His people. He is not contained to a Temple of course, but the significance of the Temple as a place of worship cannot be overstated. The Israelites would be led back home and the Temple would eventually be rebuilt. Years go by. Decades occur. And then God goes silent.

For 400 years, the people of Israel do not hear from God. This doesn't mean they don't continue to practice sacrifice. This doesn't mean that they neglect their relationship with God. This doesn't mean that God is not working among them. But God stops speaking through His prophets. What could be happening? What is God up to? Has He abandoned His people?

Then somewhere, in a little town called Bethlehem, a baby is born.

Recently, the eighth billionth person in the world was born. There was rejoicing and acknowledgement from world leaders about how this baby is ushering in a new time for our societies. The baby represents hope. But this pales in comparison to the joy and hope felt in the world when the boy in Bethlehem was born.

This baby would be named Jesus. He would sometimes go by Immanuel. He would grow among His fellow Israelites and many would begin to realize that He wasn't just a boy who grew up in Nazareth, but He was the Messiah they had been waiting for. He was better than what the Tabernacle offered. He was closer than the presence that was necessary to be distant from in the Temple. He was God among them.

There was another party, however, that believed that Him being God among them was blasphemy. They believed that Him being the Son of God was worthy of death... and not only death, but a humiliating one: death on a cross. A painful, antagonizing death. A death He didn't deserve. A death that He went through for His people... and for us. We see this spelled out in Philippians 2:3:11,

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ^[a] ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ^[b] ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, ^[c] being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

This is our God. This is how far His love would go for us. This is the last thing the world would expect... and exactly the thing God intended. To save us through His love for us.

As He took His last breath on the cross, after living a sinless life, the unthinkable happened - the veil in the Temple that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. An impossible task. A significant moment. A symbol of this man's sacrifice somehow making the dangerous, evasive presence of God accessible through the very sacrifice of God Himself.

GOD AMONG US:

Throughout the Story of the Bible, we see that God desires to be with His people. Much like the story of my dad coming to be with us, there is nothing that could separate us from the love of our Father. Doesn't matter the distance, the tension, or the circumstances... God loves His people. He loves them. He journeys with them, and takes steps to be among them. His presence is enticing and perfect, but dangerous in nature.

He walks with them through a pillar of cloud and fire.

He dwells with them in a tent called the tabernacle.

He engages with them through the establishment of a building called the Temple.

He walks among them through His Son, Jesus Christ.

God is not a distant, harsh God. He is not measuring you to see if you will measure up to being good enough for His presence. He isn't tallying your sins against you; and yet, our sin separates us from Him. It makes His presence dangerous. There's a reason that the Israelites had to be separated from Him, even when He was dwelling among them. But the game changed when the boy from Nazareth was born in Bethlehem. He perfect life, undeserved death, and foretold resurrection tore the veil that separated us from the full presence of God. Jesus allows us to live out what is so perfectly stated in Jude 24 and 25:

"Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time ^[b] and now and forever. Amen." -Jude 24-25

RESPONSE SONG

So where did that leave His people?

Jesus said in His life in John 16:7,

Immanuel
God Among Us

Exodus 13, 19; 1 Chronicles 17,
22; Philippians 2:3-11; John 16:7

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Garrett Hall

"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you."

Wait, we finally got to walk with God in the flesh! He is among us! What could be better than that? Jesus Himself says that it is better if He leaves. Why? Because the Helper would be sent. So what could be better than God among us? God in us. Next week we will explore what the torn veil truly meant and how it revolutionized the way that we get to interact with God's presence.