

Title: God is in THE House
Text: Exodus 40
Theme: The eternal presence of the glory of God
Series: Exodus #54
Prop Stmtnt. God's plan is to make the entire earth a temple for his glory.

Read Text: Exodus 40.1-2; 17-38

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. But when God created, he did everything according to a perfect design. There was no part that was superfluous, no detail that was random or without meaning. The original creation focused upon a garden from which four rivers flowed. The sky overhead, the plant and animal life and the beauty of the topography all flowed together to form a playground, a nursery, but more significantly, a sanctuary for God to come and enjoy his creation, especially his children. Every day God came to his garden, his sanctuary and enjoyed his children. God was in the house. No garden could contain all of God. No two people could take up all of his attention. God's love and presence is so infinite that he could fill an entire planet with his presence and relate perfectly with and enjoy millions of people all at the same time. And since God is so immense and therefore his joy and his ability to relate is so inexhaustible he gave the great commission to Adam and Eve. So, God told them to expand the borders of the garden. Their mission was to rule, subdue and the fill the earth with their own kind who would live with and enjoy God and delight in him. The only thing better than one kid, is a houseful, if they can be nurtured and loved and treasured and provided for. Our inexhaustible and infinite God had designed the earth to be filled with people who lived in the midst of and enjoying his glory. So, at the end of the opening week of creation, God blessed Adam and Eve and he saw all that he had made and it was very good.

It is not by mistake that that exact idea is present in the last verse of Exodus 39. This time it is Moses, the representative of God who is examining what the people had made and Moses blessed them because it was very good, that is, it was just as the Lord had commanded, and what the Lord commands is good, very good. But, the similarities between Genesis 1 and the end of Exodus go way beyond that verse. In our study of the tabernacle we have all been more than a bit amazed to see how the details of this worship center, this tabernacle all connect with such significant symbolism. This tabernacle was a miniature model of the Garden of Eden that was, and the eschatological temple that will be. The tabernacle was a small reflection that pointed back to the world as it was originally designed and it pointed to the world that is yet to come.

Psalm 78.69 says, "And he built his sanctuary like the heights, like the earth which he has founded from eternity." The tabernacle was designed to be comparable to the heavens and the earth, so that his children could realize that God is so great that his glory fills it all. The outer court represented the earth that was inhabited by people. In it there was an altar for sacrifice and a basin for washing. The original altars were made of earth and the basin was also called the bronze sea. Later, when Solomon constructed the Temple, he made the bronze basin so large that he was held up by 12 bronze bulls, divided into four groups of three, each group facing one of the four directions. The holy place symbolized

the sky and the stars while the holy of holies symbolized the actual dwelling place of God and his angels. Some have thought, (I think correctly) that the 7 lights of the lampstand symbolize, amongst other things, the 7 lights of the sky visible to the naked eye (sun, moon and five planets). The holy of holies had one piece in it – the Ark of the Covenant. The ark was the seat upon which the Shekinah glory of God rested. Over this seat, two cherubim were in place, again reflecting the very heart of all, the dwelling place of God.

The three components of the tabernacle, outer court – earth, holy place – sky and the holy of holies – the dwelling place of God are also represented in the outfit that the High Priest wore. The pomegranates on the hem represented the fertile earth. The main portion of the robe (the bluish portion) represented the sky, with the jewels representing the stars. The square ephod represented the perfectly square holy of holies, in which was the Urim and Thummin. Those were the stones that priest used to help determine the will of God in particular matters. Once again, when you compare the seven acts of God in creation along with the seven times that Exodus records that the “Lord said” in reference to the construction of the tabernacle, the parallels are too distinct and too obvious to be ignored.

The tabernacle was eventually replaced by Solomon’s temple which took 7 years to build, was dedicated on the seventh month during a feast that lasted 7 days and Solomon’s speech of dedication was organized around seven petitions. God’s dwelling on earth with his people has been his plan from the beginning. But here is what I want you to see. The OT tabernacle was a fascinating and a deeply symbolic representation of the creation and what God’s purposes were for it. The holy of holies was the place where heaven came down to earth. It was the place where the glory of God had come to rest. God was in the house. But, the house that he was in, was a tent that was designed to represent the entire earth, that is, the house that was originally built by God for God and his children. But there is more to this divine building program than looking back to the original creation. This tabernacle looked forward. It looked forward to the day when Eden would be restored. It looked forward to the day when the glory of God would fill the entire earth. It looked forward to the day when earth and heaven would be one, where God would live with and enjoy his people and they would live forever. Perhaps that is why Solomon’s temple was so much larger than the original tabernacle and Herod’s temple was even larger than that. But how could that be? How could the earth be restored? How earth and heaven become one? How could God dwell with people when these people had become so rebellious and so dirty and sinful? The answer to that tremendous tension and that ultimate question is not fully given in Exodus, but the clues to that answer are engraved and embroidered and designed all over the tabernacle. Packed into that tabernacle were items and symbols that not only reflected the different aspects of the universe, but they also at the same time pointed to Christ.

So, when you look at the end of Exodus chapter 40 from within the parameters of the book of Exodus, your heart is thrilled. These people, whose identity was in their perpetual and hopeless slavery, were now identified as the people with whom the God of universe lived! Egypt had stunning temples. But Israel had the tent, the house. And now, God was in the house. God was in the house that they had built for him. That is absolutely stunning. The command that Moses had given to Pharaoh was now

complete. “Let my people go that they may worship me in the desert.” It was happening! The God, whose name they did not even know, delivered them, fed them, clothed them, talked to them, made a covenant with them and now came down to live in the middle of them. It is a wonderful story if only seen from the beginning of Exodus. But, when you take the margins and you go back to the Garden of Eden, you cannot help but be saddened. In the Garden of Eden, there were no altars for sacrificing animals, no basins to clean the hands of the priests, no curtains to separate the people from the holy place and no incense and no veil to hide the glory of God. God was completely accessible. Now, instead of filling the garden, he confined himself to the back room of a tent. This was not how it was supposed to be! But, it was a step in the right direction, for now.

Eventually the tabernacle would be located, along with the children of Israel in the Promised Land. God was not satisfied to live in the back room of a tent. That was only a step to a greater plan. His plan was to fill the land of Canaan with his presence in such a way that the earth would be drawn to worship him through the example of the glad obedience and joyful worship his people. His people were to function as representatives of all people. So, the great commission that Adam and Eve failed to carry out was now given to the children of Israel. They were to rule, subdue and spread the borders of the nation. They were to worship God alone and live by the terms of the covenant that he had made with them. The land of Canaan was supposed to become like the Garden of Eden. God’s desire for this land of milk and honey was for it to become even more beautiful. But the land is subject to its inhabitants. And like Adam before them, they miserably failed. When Adam and Eve failed – what happened? They lost the land. That story is repeated over and over in the days of the judges. The times of the judges were characterized by idolatry, invasion, bondage, repentance and restoration. As the people consistently rebelled, God eventually left the house. At some point, the glory of the Lord that had rested on the ark in the holy of holies departed from the tabernacle, and in many ways, the nation of Israel was left to look just like the other nations. While Eli was priest, the neighboring Philistines attacked the army of Israel. In an effort to rally the troops of Israel, someone sent for the Ark of the Covenant. It was not only taken from the tabernacle against the explicit command of God, but its presence did nothing to stop the Philistines. That day, the Israelites were defeated, the high priests’ two sons were killed and the Ark of the Covenant was captured by the enemy. It was one of the darkest days in Israel’s history. God’s glory had departed. Israel had a history. She had the stories, the heroes, the law, the tabernacle, the rituals and the holidays. But, what really separated her from all of the other nations was the fact that she had God with her. God had tied his presence to the faith-driven obedience of his people. If they believed him and obeyed him, they would be set apart by him, protected by him, and prospered by him. The obvious evidence for this was the glory cloud that rested on the Ark of the Covenant in the tabernacle. So, when the glory cloud was gone, that meant that God had withdrawn his presence, his blessing, and his protection.

As she lay dying from giving birth to a son, a mother, the daughter-in-law of the high priest, named her son Ichabod that day, because it means that the glory has departed. The glory that came down in Exodus 40 was now gone. Israel, it seemed was just like the rest of the world. She stumbled in darkness. It was a time of despair. But, the story does not

end there. Even then God was already raising up a prophet who would point to a savior. The prophet was Samuel and one day he would anoint a shepherd boy. This young shepherd cared nothing more than the glory of God and the people of God. Somehow he knew that this land was more than just hills and plains, it was more than just the land of his forefathers whose blood had darkened the dirt and whose graves housed their remains. This was the land, the place where God had promised to live with his people. This boy knew that the taunts and threats of Goliath were more than just the typical trash talk on a battle field. David knew that the glory of God was at stake. To the untrained historian, the scene that day looked like a local battle, fought in the representative format. Each side picked a hero. The heroes fought with the fate of their respective nations resting on their shoulders. Did this boy have any idea of what was at stake when he volunteered to do what no one else, not even the king was willing to do? David knew, it seems better than anyone, and said so when he boldly announced Goliath's impending destruction and then promised, "and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel." How would the whole world know? In David's mind the whole world would know when the land had been taken back in order for God to come back to his house. With one stone, this boy gave a giant a headache, and with that giant's sword he became a pain in the neck (if you know what I mean). That day, the ground shook. God was coming back to Israel. That boy, David became king and that king restored the Ark to its home and he commissioned his own son to build a Temple suitable for the God of glory. Upon the completion of the Temple, 2 Chronicles 7 records the story of God coming down in the form of fire and consuming the sacrifices and filling the holy of holies so that, just like Moses in Exodus 40, the priests could not enter the temple because God's awesome presence had come down to take over. God was in the house!

It was a glorious moment that day on Mt. Moriah, where hundreds of years before, Abraham's son Isaac was spared and a ram was offered in his place. Now, on that rock stood a glorious temple with fabulous design and wealth as the pinnacle of the capital city of the most powerful empire of its day in the Ancient Near East. These former slaves now ruled their world. Their king was recognized as the king. And for a time, the great commission was being carried out as people from surrounding nations came to see the beauty, hear the wisdom and share in the joy of God's people. But, like the generations after Joshua, and Adam before them, the taste of life in the garden would be short-lived. Faith gave way to rebellion and worship gave way to idolatry. The glorious temple, along with the city would one day be burned to the ground. These people simply could not and would not live in obedience to God. The original Ark of the covenant would be lost forever. The prophet Ezekiel watched as the glory of God lifted from the holy of holies, left Jerusalem and returned to the clouds. The northern kingdom was gone and the southern kingdom was deported to Babylon. The children of Israel were right back to where they were at the beginning of Exodus. Eventually, they would return to the land and eventually the temple would be reconstructed. But this time, no fire came down, no glory cloud filled the room. For 400 years the people wandered in darkness. The land on whom the shadows had come were subject to the repeated invasions of her enemies as the consequences of her sin. As she stumbled in the night, the world around her wiped their shoes on her back and time and time again, forced her face down into the mud. There was no glory. There was no fire. There was no light, until... God raised up another

prophet, who like Samuel before him, pointed to a king. But this time it was different. This king, like David his father cared for his people and the glory of God. But this king was the glory of God. And this king who was born, was the tabernacle that the first tabernacle pointed to. The king who was born was the glory and the fire now housed in human flesh. God was in the house! The glory of God that had been contained in a room at the back end of the Temple was now walking and talking and eating and teaching. There was no curtain that separated him from others, no incense that blocked their view, but there was a veil that covered most of their hearts. The one that the tabernacle and the temple pointed to was not what they wanted. Ironically, Herod who re-built the Temple attempted to destroy THE House. Herod died, but another one came and he and the people appeared to do just that. They rejected and then crucified the glory of God. Like Adam before them, the garden was lost. Like the time of the judges, the glory was departed. Like the Babylonian captivity, the temple would lose her prominence. But, this time was different. This time the loss would be short-lived. This Savior, this King who died, rose again. And now, there was no need for a temple because there was no longer any need for sacrifices. The Savior had made the supreme sacrifice when he offered up himself in our place and shed his own blood for our souls. His death was so final and so perfect that it was the sacrifice to end all sacrifices, and the death that killed death. When he died, the holy and just wrath of God was satisfied and now God and sinners could be reconciled and now earth and heaven could really become one. So, what did this King do now?

After reassembling his disciples he repeated to them the Great Commission that had been given to Adam and Eve and to the children of Israel. In essence he said, "I want you to spread the border of my kingdom all over the world until it encompasses the entire earth." This earth is my house. This land is my temple. I made this for me. This is my kingdom. It belongs to me and I am not giving it up to another. I want you to make disciples of people from every tribe and nation and language. Preach the gospel. Tell them of my sacrifice for them. Tell them of my plan to make out this earth a temple, that is a dwelling place where I will live with them and enjoy them. Tell them that I have made that way open by my death. Show them by your lives together what life will be like forever. Live with joy. Live with humility. Live with love for each other. I want you to baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. I want you to mark them as soldiers of the army of the true King, as members of his body, as stones in his temple, as sheep in his flock as branches on his vine. I want you to instruct them and teach them all the things that I have commanded you. I want you to tell them of the kingdom that is going to come in fullness when the King returns to take back that which belongs to him. I want you to take my glory and spread it all over the earth through people who trust in me and live in unity and harmony.

But, before you go and do that, I want you to wait. Wait until I go back to the Father. Because after I go back to my Father, I am going to send you my Spirit. He is going to baptize you with fire! He is going to fill you with his presence. You are going to be my witnesses because you are going to be tabernacles. Your body is going to be the temple of God. You are going to gather together and worship together and serve together and work together and live together in such a way that you will be a reflection of Eden. And

so, on that day of Pentecost as the 120 disciples gathered together, the glory of God fell on them and the fire of God rested on their heads. They were the house and God was in the house! God's glory had come to earth. God's glory that had come to earth in the tabernacle, and in the temple, and in Christ, had now come to earth in the church. But it was not in buildings but in people.

We are the witness of the glory of God to this world. We are the light that shines in the darkness, the gospel that tells the world of forgiveness and righteousness, the truth that gives direction, and the law that provides order. We are his witnesses, his temple, his holy of holies, and the reflectors of his glory. God, through us, is in the house. But, even this arrangement is not the end. We are an imperfect house. When we fail to love each other and serve each other; when we become distracted by lesser things and live for the values dictated by a godless world, and neglect our mission to spread the borders of his house by preaching the gospel and establishing more and more outposts for his presence, we, like the people before us, risk losing our identity because no one can see the difference in our lives. When we fail to embrace the serious joy of our calling and treat the church and Christ as a spoke instead of the hub, then the fire of his glory appears dim. The authority of his truth seems to be inconsequential. Our message has no credibility when our lives reflect no passion or desire for his glory to fill the earth. We don't live for this present age. This arrangement is temporary. This life is short. This rebellious world is in decay. Our mission is urgent, even as the outcome is certain. Already God is in the house, but not yet is the house like it will be. (Revelation 21:9-27) Our task is to show the world what life will be like in the house with God. We are the house that has been raised up to reflect THE House. We are the temple that is being built all over the world to reflect THE Temple. We are the people who are being assembled under the name of the King. And that king is coming back for his bride, his temple, his flock and his land.

Rev. 19.11-16