

Title: Home Improvement pt.1
Text: 1 Peter 2.1-10
Theme: Building God's Temple
Series: Exodus conclusion
Prop Stmt We improve his home as we treasure what he prizes.

Read Text:

One of the lasting results of our Exodus study is our heightened sensitivity to the theme of the tabernacle and temple that, as I sought to demonstrate last Sunday are all throughout the Scriptures. This morning I want to do a follow-up to that message in an effort to help us think through some of the implications of what it means to live now as the present-day dwelling of the glory of God. Since God has taken up residence in our lives, we (the people of God) are the house of God. I have titled this message, home improvement because I want us to consider how we (as the people in whom and with whom God dwells) can cultivate an atmosphere that is consistent with what he has called us to be. Many of you are familiar with the fact that the NT tells believers that our bodies are the temple of God.

And since we are two days after Christmas, and 5 days before the New Year, that means, get ready for the new books on diets, the new fads on weight loss, the news stories on fitness, exercise resolutions and all of the hype that goes with it. And there are reasons for it. We tend to eat way too much around the holidays, much of which is driven by our desire for acceptance, not wanting to displease the host or hostess who made the food, or not wanting to be the only person who doesn't eat the triple-fudge, 2,400 calorie piece of cake. Periodically, someone will bring in some dessert like that for the staff. Jerry used to tell us to think of him as one who is jumping on the hand grenade for the sake of the rest of us. That is, he is sacrificing his body by eating the stuff in order to remove the temptation and the damage that would come upon us if we ate it. Of course, we were profoundly grateful to him for his selfless example.

There is something to be said for taking care of the body that God has given us. In 1 Corinthians 6.19 Paul warns about sexual immorality. His warning is not based on the complications that can come from STDs or pregnancies outside of marriage, but from the fact that if you are a follower of Christ, your body is the temple of the Spirit of God. It is also a member of Christ's body. That is very important to understand. And there are implications for that that we should think about and work out as it relates to how we view, use and take care of our bodies. For example, we ought to see that our bodies were made by God. Your personhood is directly tied to your body. You were made in image of God which involves being embodied. Your existence involves a physical existence. To mock, denigrate and abuse your body, is to trash, that which God made for his glory.

We ought also to see that our bodies are gender-specific. Our existence as the human race is based on a distinct male and a distinct female reality. While we share so much in common, there is also an intentionally God-designed uniqueness to each gender that should not be blurred nor confused. Gender is not an optional addition to our humanness.

We are made either as male or as female. This most basic and obviously observable characteristic is foundational to understanding so many other things about our humanness. We should be so grateful for our genders. We should celebrate them and learn to enjoy pure and personal relationships as a result.

Failing to understand how the body is made by God for God for the pleasure and joy of his creation is, in my estimation one of the basic reasons why our world (and the church – sadly) is so devastated by immorality, adultery, homosexuality, sexual abuse and exploitation of children and women, “sexting”, pornography and the like are all major contributors to the de-humanizing of humanity. The buying and selling of people for the sex trade is not new to this world. But, the scale upon which it is being done is one of the great tragedies of our day. In the end a person’s ability to love, to trust, to feel, to nurture, and to be faithful are all impacted by sexual activity outside of the context of marriage. Loving, trusting, feeling, and nurturing are part of our very essence as humans. When those are taken away, we are left as machines. Your body matters because it matters to God. The way you clothe your body communicates what you believe about God. Your dress should be a confirmation of your profession of godliness.

There is so much to be said about suffering and healing, about disease and dying as it relates to the body. Part of the image of God is reflected in our bodies and these bodies, which were made by God, will one day be resurrected like unto his glorious body and will imperishable, perfect, glorious, and powerful. So, there is much to ponder as it relates to the care of this old house. But, the point that I want to focus on this morning, goes beyond that.

Last week, as we came to the end of Exodus 40, we looked at the fact that the construction of the tabernacle by the children of Israel and the filling of the Holy of Holies by the glory of God was a model of God’s plan for the earth. I pointed out that the church today, is part of what the tabernacle then was pointing to. The tabernacle and the temple were designed to be evidences of God’s plan and a means to proclaim his message. So, when the Bible speaks of us as being the temple of God, I think that most of us tend to think of ourselves, that is, our bodies as isolated, disconnected, independent entities who each carry God around and when we meet together with another believer, the God in us, connects with the God in them, and we have this special connection that others without God do not get to enjoy. What I want you to see, is that since we are the temple of God, we are not disconnected, independent entities that can function as a law unto ourselves, nor can we live as God intended unless we are living in harmony with and in interdependence of the other pieces in the temple. This is particularly difficult for us who live in relative anonymity and autonomy. Right now, we are the temple of God on the earth.

Peter writes with echoes of Exodus in this letter. In v. 4 he calls us “a holy priesthood” whose task is to “offer spiritual sacrifices” that are acceptable to God. In v.9 we are called “a royal priesthood” which again has the fragrance of Exodus on it. In v.6 he quotes Isaiah 28. In verse 7 he quotes from Psalm 118 and in verse 8 he quotes from Isaiah 8. Those passages and this text in 1 Peter are particularly precious to us because

the name of our church was taken from these texts. In Isaiah 28, the prophet is speaking to the nation of Judah about the coming military invasion of her enemies. The diplomats are running around attempting to secure an alliance with Egypt in order to guarantee protection against Assyria. To these people who, instead of trusting in God are trusting in their own plans, God says, "I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: 'Whoever believes will not be in haste.'" That is, there will be no need to panic. The Psalmist pointed out in Psalm 118, that this stone that God laid in Jerusalem will be rejected by some, but will be accepted by God. The stone they consider to be worthless is in reality the most important stone of all because it will be the cornerstone to the entire structure. Verse 8 quotes from Isaiah 8 where Isaiah is again speaking about the coming military invasion. He challenges the people to trust in God (which implies faith-driven obedience and worship). If they do that, God will be their sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling. The point is this. To those who believe in him, God will provide a refuge and rescue. But, this refuge and rescue will, at the same time be a judgment to those who reject him. There is no middle ground. The point is clear. God set up the tabernacle/temple for the children of Israel as an illustration that pointed to the refuge that he provides for his people because this is where he dwells. However, if his people reject him, then that which could rescue them will judge them. Peter picks up on this theme, ties it all together and points out that what Isaiah and the Psalmist were writing about ultimately pointed to Christ. Christ fulfilled those pictures. Christ is the house of refuge who offers protection to those who believe in him. At the same time, Christ is the terrifying judge of those who reject him. Peter goes on to explain here that Christ is not only the house, the sanctuary, but he is the sanctuary now, through us. He is the "living stone" (v.4) and we are the "living stones" v.5 who are "being built up as a spiritual house". This can only happen "through Jesus Christ". The church is, the spiritual house. The church is the sanctuary. The church is the living stones built on the Living Stone that provides refuge from darkness. How do you provide refuge from darkness? You shine!

Our mission is to (v.9) "declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness [and] into his wonderful light." So, here is the question that I want us to wrestle with this morning. How can we, as the present day expression of the temple of God, how can we, as the present day expression of the people of God, how can we as the present day messengers of the message of God and the present day executioners of the plan of God carry out our calling, live out our identity, and present his glory in such a way, that his excellencies are being proclaimed because of us and through us? God has raised us up and called us together, as he has called us to him to put himself on display through us. Just as the tabernacle and the temple were a reflection of what the people thought of God, the condition of our spiritual house reflects upon the character of God. In addition to that, this temple now is to be an illustration of the temple that is coming.

But there is a tension in this text. Already, the believers to whom Peter is writing are the people of God. Not yet are they experiencing what they will have when the whole earth has been redeemed. Not yet are they living out their calling with consistency and clarity. But, they are already providing glimpses of what that day will be like. The tension is heightened by the fact that Peter is writing to various groups of believers (1.1) who are

suffering (1.6), and are called to suffer (1.21). His appeal to them is not to be surprised by suffering (4.12), but rejoice that you get to participate in the life of the body of Christ. Suffering is part of the privilege that the people of God are called to do. Suffering is an opportunity to manifest the reality of a greater reality that awaits us (4.13). His appeal is for us to love each other deeply (4.8), because love covers a multitude of sins, reflects this tension so well. Already we are the people of God, therefore, since we enjoy a bond that is forever, love each other! Love each other deeply. And beloved that is not easy, but it is so necessary because of what he then says; "Because love covers a multitude of sins." Guess what, we have a multitude of sins. If you get close to us, we are a messy group of people. We don't look so great and we are not always consistent with our calling, and we have these fits and starts and good days and not so good days. We say things that we shouldn't and don't say things that we should. But, nevertheless, by the grace of God, we already are the people of God, but not yet do we experience the unity and the fellowship and the love and the trust that we will. But, we keep pursuing that. Even under pressure we pursue that. So, in view of all of that, how can we help improve this home? How can we make this temple a more accurate reflection of God, or a more fitting dwelling place for his glory?

1. **Get rid of what doesn't look like Jesus.** (v.1)

Get rid of malice. Get rid of deceit. Get rid of hypocrisy. Get rid of envy. Get rid of slander. I want you to read verse 1 slowly to yourself, looking carefully at those vices that we are called to put away and ask yourself, what do these sins have in common? Malice is the desire to inflict pain, harm or injury on another person. Deceit and hypocrisy are twins. Deceit is done in order to wrong a person. Hypocrisy is pretending to be something that you aren't. Envy desires to have something that someone else possesses and slander, is talking about another person with the intent of tearing them down or reflecting poorly upon them. The obvious connection with these vices is that they are 1) sins of the heart that are expressed in 2) ways that bring about harm to other people.

One morning I discovered that someone had defaced our building with some vulgar graffiti. It doesn't happen that much, but it does from time to time and we respond to it right away. But, this building is not the true temple. We are. Malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander are much more serious forms of graffiti that deface the temple. Should you be concerned about weight loss and taking care of your body? Yes. Take care of your physical body. But don't stop there. You are part of the people of God. You are part of his temple now. You reflect his glory now. Rid yourself of these things! But how? Notice the connection between v.1 and v.2-3. We will get rid of what doesn't look like Jesus, when we crave Jesus!

2. **Crave Jesus!** (2-3)

Wow, that is a powerful analogy! Newborn infants are born with desire. They desire milk. They will not be satisfied if you give them a new car. They want milk. And if they don't get milk, then they are going to make life very miserable for everyone within a quarter mile. Like a newborn infant craves milk, you are to crave Jesus! That is why I

want you to see that verse 1 is not so much a list of rules as it is a reflection of desire. If you are craving Jesus, you will be disgusted by malice. If you are craving Jesus then you will be convicted when you attempt to deceive another person, or when you are pretending to be something that you are not. Beloved, v.1 describes our world. These are characteristics of darkness. This world will steal your purse. This world will steal your identity. This world will steal your job, your car, and your heart. This world is full of Bernie Madoff's who pretend to be your friend, who earn your trust and then rob you blind. This world is full of that because it follows the prince of darkness, who is the father of lies. That is not who we are. The people with whom God dwells are people of light. They have nothing to hide. Not because they are perfect! Oh no! We are not perfect! If we pretended to be perfect, if we acted like we had our act together, it would only be an act. If we tried to give the impression that we had arrived we would be the very worst violators of verse 1. Hypocrisy has no place amongst the people of God. Hypocrisy is driven by a desire to give people a good impression of ourselves. But, when we crave Jesus, we recognize that we don't need to give others a good impression of ourselves, we are to preach him. If you have tasted that the Lord is good, you want others to taste that the Lord is good.

It is like tasting the most delicious, the most sense-exploding, mouth-filling, eye-popping piece of food that you have ever had, and because you love others, you want them to have it too. I take that last expression in v.3 as Peter's description of coming to faith in Christ. I believe that is what he is describing as a result of being born again (1.23). Those who are born again, have their souls purified by obedience to the truth (1.22). The person who has been made alive by the Spirit of God (who uses the word of God – v.23) obeys the truth. They believe the gospel. They are forgiven. They love other believers from a pure heart. They have tasted that the Lord is good. They have experienced authentic love, faithfulness, and pure acceptance. So, it is very clear that foundational to all of these things is coming to faith in Christ. When the Spirit of God opens the eyes of your heart, you are born again. You are made alive spiritually and as a result the eyes of your heart see the beauty and worth and desirability of Christ and you trust in him as your King and Savior. Your spiritual senses are made alive and now, your taste buds have a longing for that which is truly good. That is why you crave Jesus when you are a believer. And when you crave Jesus, you will keep coming back for more.

3. **Treasure Christ above all things.** (4-6)

“As you come to him” is a phrase that means that you keep coming to him. Come to Christ for salvation and keep coming to him for satisfaction. We are to treasure Christ, not simply because he is the only means by which we can be saved. The reason why we treasure Christ above all things, is because God treasures Christ. According to v.4, Christ is the living stone who is rejected by men, “but in the sight of God” is “chosen and precious.” Since God treasures Christ above all things, I want you to treasure Christ above all things. I want you to treasure Christ above a good economy. I want you to treasure Christ above health. I want you to treasure Christ about comfort. I want you to treasure Christ above money, clothes, or a job, or a car, or the Red Wings defeating the Blackhawks, or above acceptance by others. Beloved, this temple, the real sanctuary will

be a fitting home for the glory of God as we do what God does, and that is consider Christ to be more valuable than anything else. God calls his Son chosen. God calls his Son precious. God has guaranteed that anyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.

We are constantly tempted by desires that are so much less than Christ. When our souls are not coming to him and having our senses set on fire with fresh tastes of his mercy, then we will look for pleasure in lesser things. There are plenty of lesser things that will gladly steal our affections, but they will never satisfy. God commands us to find our soul's delight in his Son because Christ is the only true satisfaction. His love is true. His forgiveness comes without an edge. His mercy cannot disappoint you. His promises cannot be broken by circumstances. His oath, his covenant are established on the basis of his death, resurrection and ascension which point to his promised return in glory.

Beloved, do you crave Jesus, like a newborn craves milk? God gave you desires so that you will desire him. Desiring God and treasuring Christ is a group project and a group delight. We will look like his temple, when we savor him and listen to him and then joyfully obey him.