

The Incarnate Christ, the temple builder

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[0 : 00] So what I'd like us to look at this evening is the incarnate Christ thought of in connection! So this morning we looked at the incarnation and I think the Lord helped us this morning! We were able to see there's a lot going on and it teaches us some quite profound things about the nature of God and the nature of relating to God and what it is to receive God into our lives in a similar way to the way that Mary received the Lord into her life as it were. So it is a miracle and it is a mystery but it isn't irrational and ridiculous and there are some keys to understanding the incarnation and I would like to suggest this evening that the idea of the temple is one such key.

When I say the temple I mean the temple as in the Bible, the Jerusalem temple as it were. So the thought I'd like to propose this evening is that it is a helpful thing and it is a rich thing to consider the incarnate Son of God in terms of the ideas of the temple or the teachings of the temple or indeed the theology of the temple and that's what I'd like us to look at. And so here you might be thinking some objections, you might be having any number of objections but here's some that I thought of. Number one, you might be saying, well isn't this supposed to be a reformed church and reformed people only ever think of Christ as prophet, priest and king? To which I reply, it's reasonably helpful to think of Christ as prophet, priest and king. It was a theology developed by Calvin, he didn't originate it, it was originally a Roman Catholic or Catholic way of thinking and we're not being disloyal to the reformation if we were to say that prophet, priest and king isn't meant to cover everything and in fact if we stick to it too rigidly we might miss stuff. So I'd like to suggest that temple is in the Bible although it isn't obviously covered by prophet, priest and king. So I hope you won't get hung up with that particular objection. Second objection is found in Ephesians 2 verse 19. So helpful if you can find these places and if you can see that anybody near you is struggling to find the place, do give them a hand. I haven't got a page number for this, Ephesians 2.19.

1.174 1.174 1.174 1.174 And I don't think that's going to help Maureen at all because her Bible's got different numbers, hasn't it? Yeah, okay, so Yeah, righty-ho.

Ephesians 2.19 Ephesians 2.19 Ephesians 2.19 says to the Christians Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow citizens with God's people, members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

[3 : 45] In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit.

Okay, so that I'm saying is an objection to my proposal that we're to think of Christ as the temple. Anybody see why that might be an objection?

It's the church. Yes, exactly. Because it says that the church is the temple. So it talks about verse 21, you, no, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple.

And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit. And my answer to that is that there's a number of things in the Bible in which Christ is the something, but we are in a subsidiary way.

Because we belong to Christ, it sort of rubs off on us and we become a bit of that as well. And I would say that it is true that the church is described as a temple, but the church is described as a temple in him.

[5 : 01] So it's because of being linked to Christ. And I'm going to say that the whole idea of God dwelling with in-person people has a number of fulfillments.

It crops up in a number of places and that doesn't stop it being true of Jesus in a particular way. Okay, the third objection, so I've whooshed past that, so if you're still objecting to it, I've left you behind now.

So Hebrews 8 verses 1 and 2 would be another objection. Hebrews 8, 1 and 2.

Which says, The point of what we are saying is this, we do have such a high priest who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven, who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.

So could you see a point of objection in those verses? Correct. It says Christ is the priest in the temple in heaven.

[6 : 24] So the sanctuary meaning the holy place and the true tabernacle being God's presence in heaven. To which I say, So the objection is, if Christ is the priest, he can't also be the tabernacle or the temple.

To which I say, Actually, Christ is several things simultaneously. Because he's the priest and he's also the sacrifice.

And he's also the king. And he's the priest who manipulates the blood, but his is the blood as well.

So I'm not going to be too fazed by that objection. I'm going to say Christ, there's many different rich pictures of Christ. And they each show us something.

So I'm still going to say that Christ as the temple is a true picture. That's what I hope to demonstrate. And it isn't overruled by the fact that he's other things as well.

[7 : 30] Temple theology has a number of fulfillments. But I don't think that stops us thinking of Christ as in some way the chief fulfillment. Or the, if you like, a major fulfillment of the thought of the temple.

So I'm saying there's multiple repetitions of themes. And yet I'm going to say that Christ is the fulfillment of the temple idea.

Okay, you still with me? Anybody want to go home yet? Okay, Steve's thinking about it. Okay, so let's say does this have any cash value?

By which I mean, is it just a load of random thoughts? Or does it help us in any sort of way? And I would say at least this, that it saves us from having to remodel the inside of the church so that the church, I mean church building, so that we feel, because it says in the Bible there's a holy place and a most holy place and there's barriers around it, that actually we should start getting barriers in here and having holy places and not so holy places and modeling our meeting place on the temple.

It says we don't have to do that because the fulfillment isn't in architecture. And I'd also like to say that it, if we follow the line of thinking that I'm going to talk about, it also saves us from thinking of a present or future temple building somewhere geographically on this earth.

[9 : 23] There's a way of interpreting the Bible which says, ah, God's going to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and Christians should be rooting for that and praying for it and supporting it.

And I'm going to say that is a complete cul-de-sac, it's a complete mistake as to what the temple is all about. So I'm going to say that at least it would save us from that.

And the third, and you're also getting sort of all sorts of complicated and unfruitful speculations about prophecy and the nation of Israel and it just gets very, very off track.

And I think this will save us from that and I would also like to put forward the idea that we gain a certain richness in thinking about Jesus if we see him in this light.

So that's where I'm going with this. Are you still with me? Okay, well this is, this slide, next one's got everything on it.

[10 : 30] So let's have a working definition. So what am I talking about? I'm talking about the temple as a physical place, nearly always but not absolutely always, a physical place on earth where the God of heaven dwells.

So it's a physical place where the God of heaven dwells. And because of that, there are certain suitabilities of the temple.

Certain things are suitable to it. Certain things have attached themselves or are attached to this place. For example, there's an altar because you need blood if God is going to dwell with people.

And it has certain functions. There's a certain functionality because God lives with his people and that has certain functional effects. For example, God is there to give guidance, shall we say.

There's more to it than that. And also, the temple has a built-in limitation, which is constantly being tested in, no matter how big you build the temple, is it big enough to contain God?

[11 : 42] And often the references come up against us and say, even the highest heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain you, how much less this temple that I've built.

So it has all those things. So that's my sort of working definition. A temple is a physical place, probably on earth, where the God of heaven dwells. There are suitabilities with it, functionalities and limitations.

So let's look at some examples of this. So I've got a timeline there. And I wish I could, I knew how to point to it.

I haven't got the hang of that bit yet. So we're going to go over here to the tent bit. Now what I want to say is there's acres and acres and acres of text to do with the temple.

So in reading your Bible, you might have come across this. Exodus 29. So let's try and not get bogged down in the acres of text. But you can see they're there.

[12:46] Exodus 29. If you've ever read through Exodus, you will know that there is chapter after chapter on how to build the tabernacle, what to make it out of, which bits you put up first, how the scaffolding is made, the various coverings and so on and so on and so on.

And it's very easy to get bogged down with that. The blessed Alec Mateer said once, I heard him on a tape saying, Beloved, when the Bible gets boring, you'll know that God's saying something really important to you.

And there's wisdom in that, isn't there? You read it and you think, this is so boring going on and on and on. But really it's there because it's important. And it's a question of grasping, you know, what am I supposed to take in about this?

So Exodus 29, verse 44 to 46, seems to be a key idea. So you've got these acres of text about how to build this tabernacle.

Now why? Verse 44, So I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar and will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests.

[14:03] Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the Lord their God.

Notice this bit. Who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.

That's a crucial understanding, isn't it? What is the book of Exodus all about? Why did God bring his people out of Egypt? Answer, So that I might dwell among them.

What's the tabernacle with all its layers and tents and barriers and everything? What's it there for? Because God wants to live with his people.

Which is a remarkable statement, isn't it? I don't know if ever people come and stay with you for a while. Well, it wouldn't be beyond the possibilities that they get fed up with your funny and strange ways and breathe a sigh of relief when they go home after a week.

[15:08] But here is God who says of his people, I want to dwell with them. Remarkable, isn't it? So let's think of this whole tabernacle, tent, temple thing.

God wants to live with his people. What I should have said was on this timeline, we have, see I can't even make a shadow because it's up there.

The temple was made out of bricks, no, well, stones. But it was just a sort of a hard copy version of the tabernacle which is made out of textile material, fabric and skins and things like that.

This one was mobile. You could pick up the tent and move it on. The temple was fixed. But basically they do the same sort of thing. Let's think of the suitabilities of the temple.

If you just go on another few verses, you'll see that there's an altar. And I don't want to, it would get really, really boring if I tried to take us through every verse.

[16:21] But take it from me and you can read it up when you go home. There's lots and lots saying the only way a holy God can live in the midst of a sinful people, which is what God wants to do, is to have a massive provision of blood.

So there is virtually a 24-7 provision of sacrifices and blood. It's a little bit like bailing out a leaky boat.

You never stop doing it. Leaky boat, you know what I mean? The water's constantly coming in, you're constantly bailing it out. And if you stop for a little while, you've got to do it all over again.

And one of the lessons of the tabernacle is that we're sinful people. And if there's no atonement made, then our sins would pretty soon sink us in the presence of God.

But we're constantly bailed out by blood sacrifice. A constantly applied atonement.

[17:41] Now, of course, as Christians, we don't have Jesus being constantly crucified for us. But we do have the once sacrifice being constantly referenced in heaven.

Christ is in heaven constantly interceding for us. And in that sense, it's a step change from Exodus. Other features of the tabernacle. Anybody know what colors the tabernacle was?

Blue, gold, scarlet. Yeah. Anybody know anything about the decorations of the tabernacle?

Pomegranates. Pomegranates.

Pomegranates. Pardon? Bells. Bells. Yeah. Bells, pomegranates. Pomegranate is a... Does it grow on a tree, a pomegranate? Okay.

[18:51] Pomegranates grow on trees. So we've got this sort of tree thing. And are creatures in the tabernacle. Were there any creatures there? There are any creatures there. Cherubim above the ark.

Cherubim. Cherubim above the ark. And the cherubim have wings. And they spread their wings above the ark. I always used to tell the kids they probably went like that and like that.

And in between was God's throne. They sort of formed a throne for God. So that was the tabernacle.

Let's look at one functionality of it. Exodus 40, verse 36. Exodus 40, verse 36.

In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out. But if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out until the day it lifted.

[20:05] So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels. So this is the cloud signifying the presence of God.

What function is there attached to the tabernacle there? To do with knowing when to stay, when to set out.

Presence of God. Presence of God, yeah. Sorry? Leading. Yeah, leading. I think leading is right.

What are we supposed to do?

Do we go on? Do we stay? Well, the tabernacle gives us that functionality. If the cloud is in the tabernacle, you stay. If the cloud moves out, then you move out as well.

So there's a presence and a leading thing going on there. So the tent. Right at the end of the line, I put G.

[21:10] And you have to guess what G stands for, because there's another place right earlier on where you had the presence of God, you had trees with fruit, and you had cherubim, and you also had onyx and other things which don't immediately come to mind, which you also had in the tabernacle.

Anybody like to suggest what the G stands for? The garden. Yeah, if you think about it, the garden, the Garden of Eden right at the beginning was tabernacle-like.

It's not a building. It's not like a tent, but it has the presence of God. It has cherubim, doesn't it? Do you remember? Cherubim guarding the way there.

It has a garden-like, you know, there's fruit and trees with stuff. So it's rather an attractive thought to say that the temple idea is there right at the very beginning.

It isn't something that suddenly comes in later from nowhere. It's sort of in a... The seed of it is there at the beginning.

[22:27] Can we go to Genesis 28? Genesis 28. Genesis 28.

Genesis 28. In the school that I went to, in the junior school I went to, which is Church of England School in Bridge North, we learnt this off by heart, but I have to say I've forgotten it now.

We all stood in the front of the church and recited it. Genesis 28, verse 10. Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set.

Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

And there above it stood the Lord who spoke. And then in verse 16, it says, When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.

[23:50] He was afraid and said, How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God. This is the gate of heaven. And it says he set that stone up as a pillar, verse 18, And called the place Bethel.

Does anybody know what Bethel means? House of God. So are we noticing this? Because what we had was a stone and a ladder. But Jacob says this is the house of God.

And we know that a temple is often referred to as the house of God. So I would like to claim in Genesis 28, 11, we have the house of God in its absolutely minimal form with just one stone. Just one stone of the house of God. What do you notice about functionality here of what Jacob says is the house of God? What's the functionality of it?

What's going on in terms of function? It's a way to God's presence, isn't it? It's a ladder, Jacob's ladder, a stairway.

[25 : 05] So functionally, what goes up and down on this? The angels, yes.

It's a connection between earth and heaven. And the Lord is at the top of the stairs, am I right? And presumably, although we're not told this happens, the Lord could descend on the stairs.

But it connects earth to heaven. That's what this does. It's put to us as a staircase, a stairway, a ladder. But it's also put to us as being the house of God.

And it's a very interesting, if you think there's all sorts of seed thoughts in there about the house of God, about what I would say, about the temple.

Can we flip over into the New Testament? I think I've got myself a bit out of order. But John chapter 1.

[26 : 12] Does this shed any light on Jesus? And I think the answer is yes.

So John chapter 1, verse 14, which we looked at this morning. John chapter 1, verse 14.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. Has anybody got a different translation for that?

The Word became flesh and. Anybody any different? Has anybody got it as a verb? The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

No, we haven't got enough variety of Bibles. Literally, it is a verb. The Word became flesh and camped among us.

[27 : 34] Very like the tent, God came and lived in a tent with his people. And it says, Jesus came and camped with us.

He lived in a tent amongst us. And John chapter 1, verse 51.

In John chapter 1, it actually all takes seven days, surprisingly. And during those seven days, there are multiple encounters between Jesus and his disciples.

They come out with a whole string of things, which I think they probably didn't understand, but they're absolutely correct in saying. So Nathanael meets Jesus in verse 49.

It says, Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel. And Jesus says to him, and get this, you believe I, you believe I told you I saw, you believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree.

[28 : 41] You shall see greater things than that. Then he added, I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

Does that remind you of anything? It's just like Jacob's ladder, isn't it? But in this case, the ladder isn't a staircase. The ladder is Jesus.

And do you see the connection? He's saying the functionality of connecting earth and heaven, of messages from heaven coming down to earth. And if you like, messages from earth going up to heaven, is me, says Jesus.

And that's what you'll see happening. Which seems to me a rather remarkable link between temple theology and the person of Jesus Christ.

Let's look at the, let's go forward in time to the temple here, to Samuel. 2 Samuel 7.

[29 : 53] 2 Samuel 7. Now this is the step change where from the tent, we're moving into the solid building of the temple and it's King David who wants to be the temple builder.

And he says this to Nathan the prophet and a word of the Lord comes back from Nathan in verse 7. 2 Samuel 7.

7. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people, why have you not built me a house of cedar?

He says, God says, I've never required that. And it goes on to say, and I don't want you to do this, but I do want your son to do it.

And you see the Messiah is the temple builder. That's part of his destiny, if you like. 2 Kings 8.

[31 : 17] I wonder if that's right. I've got 2 Kings 8, 17 to 19. I think that must be wrong. Maybe it was 1 Kings. Have I?

Ah. Which one of these many figures is correct? I think it's the 1 Kings, isn't it?

I think I meant 1 Kings 8. Because here's acres and acres, 1 Kings, acres and acres of stuff about the building of the temple.

We had acres of text about the, you know, huge amounts of text about the building of the tabernacle. I've got huge amounts of text about the building of the temple. So I think we're 1 Kings 8, verse 17.

My father David had it in his heart to build a temple for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. But the Lord said to my father David, because it was in your heart to build a temple for my name, you did well to have this in your heart.

[32 : 25] Nevertheless, you are not the one to build the temple, but your son, who is your own flesh and blood, he is the one who will build the temple for my name. So it's the son of David who is the temple builder.

And again, as I say, there's lots and lots of text, but let's try and pick out a little bit. In chapter 8, verse 10, we have another thing that we've seen a little while ago.

1 Kings 8, verse 10, So what's the bit that we've seen before there?

The cloud. Yeah, because the cloud was over the tabernacle and now the cloud comes into the temple. And what would we think the cloud signified?

Yeah, the presence of God and his glory. I think the Jewish commentators have their own word for this, the Shekinah. Not quite sure about that, but it says, the glory of the Lord filled the temple.

[33 : 42] So there's a filling presence of God. Are we okay with that? And verse 27, still in chapter 8, verse 27, has got something, this limitation factor.

1 Kings 8, 27, But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built.

So there's this reminder and it comes up in different places. Here is the temple. God's presence is there, but it doesn't contain God.

You know, you can't, God isn't sort of squashed into it. It's a bit like the TARDIS, that it's bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. And that keeps on cropping up and it's a rather mysterious and wonderful thing.

In one way you could say it is that it isn't actually a container at all, it's a ladder, it's a portal, it's the interface between this world and heaven.

[34 : 55] So if you come to the door of the temple and you look in and you see into heaven, as it were, do you see what I mean? So the temple, if it might say, have I been with you so long and you haven't realized that if you've seen into me, you've seen the Father?

Which would, you see what I'm getting at there. Let's look at functionality. And there's a lot about functionality of the temple, of which we just look at chapter 8.

You might have come across this chapter. I've got 22 to 53, which is a huge section.

Let's just light on one verse or so. What about verse 38? So functionality. When famine or plague comes and a prayer is made by any of the people of Israel and they spread out their hands towards this temple, hear from heaven your dwelling place, forgive and act, etc.

What would you say is the functionality of the temple in that verse? And there's multiple verses that say much the same thing. What is the function of the temple?

[36 : 19] A place where something happens. Sorry? Yeah, sacrifice is made. Yeah. Yeah, it's a place, there's really a place of prayer, isn't it?

The place of communication communication in term of need. You pray. You don't just sort of pray all over the place. You pray focusing on the temple and God who is in the temple or communicates via the temple, he's saying, please will you hear prayer and will you send out from the temple, as it were, your answers to prayer.

So the functionality of the temple is a place of answered prayer. And you might, you know, if you put all these things into the melting pot and say, is Jesus anything to do with this?

Does Jesus fulfill these things in any way? And you start ticking up a whole load of boxes, don't you? Because for Christians, let me just spell this out, for Christians, when we pray, we don't come into a church building and face east or whichever way the church building is and bow towards the altar and pray towards a particular piece of furniture in the church building.

We don't do that, do we? That's the sort of thing they used to do, but that's not what we do because we orientate ourselves towards, what do we point ourselves towards?

[37 : 52] Jesus. Because he fulfills the functionality of the temple. He's the place of answered prayer. And I put the cross there, X, X cross, because the temple was destroyed.

This is part of the story of the temple. It was destroyed. And I put the little upward facing arrow because what happened there there after 70 years or so?

It was rebuilt. Yeah. And as you read through your Bible, you will realize that there was huge angst about the destruction of the temple because it, the idea of the place where God's presence, the place where prayers were answered, the only place where you could make sacrifices, that being destroyed, sort of undermined their faith or let's say challenge their faith, I think on the same sort of level as current evolutionary theory challenges Christian faith.

You know, just as Christians might say, well, if that's true, then we're complete idiots. So they might have said in those days, if the temple gets destroyed, you know, what are we left with?

Because God is there. And there's huge concern, you know, how can this happen? The whole book of Lamentations, what's gone wrong? You know, has God completely messed this up?

[39 : 31] Does he not keep his promises? What's going on? And the book of Lamentations, what's it say? The steadfast love of the Lord lasts forever.

His mercies are new every morning. And the writer said, I'm sure even though the temple's been destroyed, God's mercy still is a living reality.

Of course, you get the temple rebuilt and huge amounts of emphasis given to that. So all those building projects in the prophets around here, they're to do with the rebuilding of the temple.

Please turn to Ezekiel. So he's a prophet who takes this incredibly seriously. When I say incredibly, I don't actually mean incredibly in the sense that you can't believe it, I just mean very.

Ezekiel takes it very seriously. In chapter 11. 11.22, the cherubim with the wheels beside them spread their wings and the glory of the God of Israel was above them and the glory of the Lord went up from within the city and stopped above the mountain east of it.

[41 : 09] And there the glory is not coming into the temple, but leaving the temple. So terrible thing. How, you know, what's going on?

You need a whole book of prophecy to wrestle with that. If you go to Ezekiel 40, Ezekiel 40, Ezekiel 40, and you don't have to read the whole thing.

You could just read the NIV heading for it. What's the heading for Ezekiel 40? New temple area. And Ezekiel the prophet says there will be a new temple and if you care to read it, it's put in, I've written this in my notes, but I can't see what I've written.

It's, the new temple is described in, I can't think of the word, I was going to say exaggerated, I don't mean exaggerated, but very larger than life terms.

It's, I forget now, isn't it thousands of miles big and cubic and all sorts of things that you could say, what he's trying to tell us is that although the temple was destroyed, the temple theology is not dead and God hasn't been defeated, it will, there will be a fulfillment of these temple things sort of in a bigger way than you can possibly imagine.

[43 : 17] And I want you to grasp that he's not just saying we can meet in, you know, we'll be meeting again.

You know, they could have done what many churches do, they could have met in a school hall, couldn't they? You know, they didn't have to rebuild the temple, they could have gone and met in a school hall or they could have met around in somebody's front room.

But the fact that they say, the temple is the key thing, it's because of the whole theology of the temple, it's the suitability of the temple and the functionality of the temple and everything that goes along with it.

it represents, it spells out, it means the place where God comes down to earth, where we can view into heaven, where the sacrifices necessary are found, where there's all sorts of things like answered prayer and guidance and the presence of God and all of these things and Ezekiel is saying, big tick, yeah, this will happen, this will definitely happen, don't give up on that, God will do it.

So let, and that brings us to John chapter 2. And I ask the question, what will it look like when God rebuilds the temple?

[44 : 57] And according to Jesus, in John chapter 2, so I come to verse 13, it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem, in the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves and others sitting at tables exchanging money, so he made a whip out of cords

