

Living Temples

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[0 : 0 0] Let's share our prayer together. Heavenly Father, we humbly bow in your presence.! May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher,! and your great glory our supreme concern.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. There are lots of temples all around the world and perhaps you've been able to visit some of them on holiday or in different places.

Many of them are just ruins, stones lying scattered on the site. Some of them are still standing and you can go inside and try to imagine what worship was like in the temple.

Many of them have become tourist attractions, divorced somewhat from their original purpose in worship and faith.

The idea of temple is at the heart of this passage in 1 Peter. So let's briefly get an idea of what God's purpose is for temple.

[1 : 2 1] What does God think a temple is and is for? It's well known that the Garden of Eden, Genesis chapter 2, is described in language and in outlay in a similar way to the temple.

Eden was a temple where God came and walked in the cool of the evening in the midst of his creation. After the fall and the expulsion from Eden, God eventually gives his people a tent.

Moses set up a tent outside the camp and he would go to the tent and when he was in the tent, he would meet with God. So much so that when he came out from the tent, his face was shining.

And everyone knew he had been in the presence of God because of his shining face. A tent set aside from all creation on the pattern of Eden as a place where people could come and be in the presence of God.

A garden is changed to a tent. A tent is changed to a building of stone and metal. Solomon builds a temple in Jerusalem.

[2 : 5 0] When the priests came out of the holy place at the dedication of the temple, a cloud filled the house of the Lord so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, because the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.

I often wonder what we would do or how we would respond if in the midst of our worship together here, the Holy Spirit descended and filled the place with the cloud of his glory and none of us were able to carry on.

An overwhelming sense of God's powerful presence. That's what the temple is. That's what God has designed temples to be.

His place. And if you go there, you meet him. Changed from a garden to a tent to a building in a city, God's idea of temple was changed again when Jesus came.

In John chapter 2, Jesus said to the folks in Jerusalem, destroy this temple. And in three days, I will build it again. And they said, it's taken us 46 years to build it and you're going to raise it up in three days.

[4 : 1 4] But Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body. We're not in bricks and stones anymore. We're in the body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The temple is the presence of God. Jesus is the one who is God with us. Emmanuel.

Christmas every day, even in June. God is with us. And then it changes again. Revelation chapter 21, when we stand in the presence of God.

John, the visionary writes, I saw no temple. The visionary doesn't see anything. He doesn't see a temple. But what he does see is the Lord God Almighty.

That is the temple. The Lamb of God who was slain before the foundation of the world. He is the temple, the presence of God into which people from every tribe and nation and tongue are gathered.

[5 : 27] Temple is all about being in God's presence. And so it must have really puzzled those religious Greeks and Romans when the Christians started going about and talking about their new faith in Jesus.

And an interesting Greek person might say, well, where is your temple? Oh, come along. And we can go into your temple and find out what it's all about. And the Christian would say, but we don't have a temple.

Because the presence of God is with us. We need to feel the wonder of what Peter is saying to us today.

God in Christ brings his presence into us. God in his Holy Spirit pours his presence into our lives. And we become the temple. We become the presence of God before all creation and for all creation.

[6 : 36] In the kingdom of God, there is not one place. There is not one temple. But there is one renewed and restored people who are the temple, the presence of God.

And so Peter writes, you come to him, Jesus, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God, chosen and precious. You yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

As Christians, we come to Jesus. We are Jesus' people. He has called to us and made his mercy known to us, and we have responded by rushing to him.

As we answer his call, we are connected by God together with Jesus. It's like Lego blocks.

Remember, children used to have trolleys, wee wooden trolleys, and they were quite narrow, and they had coloured wooden blocks in them. Remember those things? Maybe you had one for your children or grandchildren.

[8 : 02] And the blocks could stand on top of one another, but they weren't ever connected to one another. And they wouldn't get very high before they toppled over. And then Lego came along.

And all the blocks had wee teeth on the top of them. And you could join them together with the other block. And they could, remember trying to get them apart, how difficult that could be.

That's the picture I have of living stones. Stones that connect, that join together with one another, that are difficult thereafter to separate.

That sounds good, doesn't it? Isn't that what we hoped for? I'll come to Jesus, and it'll be Jesus and me joined together. But there are other living stones.

There are not only two living stones, Jesus and me. Because you're a living stone as well. There are great truths of our salvation, things that Jesus has done for me.

[9 : 20] He died on the cross to forgive my sin. He rose again from the dead to bring me into new life. He poured out the Holy Spirit to fill me that I might live for him.

But all these truths are true also of you. They're not only true of me. It can be a bit of a shock as we mature in our Christian living to find out that life is not only Jesus and me, but it's actually Jesus and us.

Peter writes that we are made into these living stones. The very temple, the place where the presence of God dwells, where all the nations are supposed to come to experience the presence of God.

And halfway through, it changes. we stop being the bricks of the temple and become the priests who serve in the temple. A place where a mediator introduces those who come to the temple to the God whose presence is in the temple.

in our discipleship, in our being connected to Christ, in our being the living stones, we serve as priests, the priesthood of all believers.

[10 : 51] We are the ones who are to introduce all creation to the one and only God there is, to Jesus Christ, his Son, who is the Savior of all, to the Holy Spirit who is poured out generously upon all.

We are, if you like, the tour guides in the temple. When somebody comes, we take them and say, come and let me introduce you to the God who's here. Now you might get to know him for yourself. Problem with the whole idea of the temple is we remember something went wrong. We remember Jesus got angry and turned over temples and drove people out.

For the temple to be acceptable to God, it is to be his place, his presence, not our place. Service is to be offered which is sacrificial.

in this context, that means on behalf of others. Not for me because I'm already connected to Jesus, but on behalf of others so that they might be connected to Jesus.

[12:13] The church is to be the body of Christ, a temple of living stones, not a museum place or a tourist attraction, but a living encounter with the living God.

For us, we need to meet with our God and to know his presence. Yes, we do, but so do others. And God is building you and me into the place, into the people through whom he will meet all peoples, all nations, all creation for his glory.

Peter quotes the Bible. Behold, I'm laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious. Whoever believes in him will never be put to shame. So the honour is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, stone of stumbling, a rock of things. They stumbled because they disobeyed the word as they were destined to do.

The story of Jesus is a story of rejection. This is not something that should be unexpected, but as we read the Old Testament has been foretold for a long time.

[13:35] He was despised, despised and rejected. We know this in our days. There are many who reject Jesus and everything to do with him.

But for God, Jesus is the chosen cornerstone, the precious one, from whom the whole building takes its shape.

Isn't that a good way to think about our Christian life? What does it mean for us to be disciples? We seek to live Jesus-shaped lives, to come to Jesus and to form, to conform our lives, to reshape our living into the same shape as Jesus.

That's what we're doing. That's what we're here for. Jesus is a living stone, not a dead lump of marble.

He is the living word of the living God. When we shape our lives against Jesus, we become alive. We begin to live as God's people, making God known in God's world.

[15:00] There is a contrast then between those whose lives are shaped by Jesus and those whose lives are not shaped by Jesus. Those who come to Jesus and submit to him and those who turn away from Jesus and reject him.

For one there is honour, for the other there is shame. there is a sharing in the honour which God has bestowed upon Christ. Or we find that having rejected Jesus, we share in the dishonour of rejecting him.

These are humbling and challenging verses, verses which have incorrectly been used violently over the years to point to others. We are better than you are.

excluded. We are the good ones. But surely as we read the whole Bible we know that's not what is meant.

We are not called in Christ to shape our lives in a way that excludes others but in a way that attracts others.

[16:13] We have shaped our life, conformed our life to the pattern of Jesus and that is meant to be a beautiful attractive thing. There's nothing beautiful and attractive about standing and pointing others and saying you're out and we're in.

Jesus says if you must point to others point with your whole hand and say take my hand and let me bring you in. Let me gather you close to Jesus that you might know him.

And so commend Christ to all people. Remember that passage near the end of the gospel story where Jesus and the disciples have been in the temple teaching and doing parables and they come out of the temple and they sit on the Mount of Olives and if you've been to the Mount of Olives you know how close it is to the city just across the valley and one of the disciples says to Jesus look at the wonderful stones in the temple and maybe they say look at the minerals in that one the way the sun sparkles on it look at the way that one's been carved look at the size of that one they start talking about the characteristics of the stones Peter writes and here's the characteristics of the living stones Jesus is building us into you are a chosen race you are a royal priesthood you are a holy nation you are a people for

God's own possession you proclaim the excellencies of the God who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light you once were not a people but now you are God's people you once had not received mercy but now God has shown you mercy chosen by God we are living stones in the same way as God chose Jesus and set him at the corner God chooses us and sets us in our place

in his living temple that we might make him known we don't get to choose the place where God will put us we get to be chosen by him this is about humility not pride God has chosen us and taken us and sets us in a place to make him known to others that's who we are that's what we are to be like we are a royal priesthood appointed by the king of kings to serve his people priesthood is about service about denying yourself to bless others our great desire in following

Jesus is to make him known to others that we might serve them that they might come to know him that's the characteristic of a living stone in the midst of a world rejecting Christ and despising God we are called to live as holy people and in this context that means being like God living like Jesus love joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness self control God has told us it's not hard for us to know what it is to be holy to be patient with one another and with others outside to live kindly to be self controlled it's not difficult to know the things that

[20 : 26] God requires of us to love justice to seek mercy and walk humbly with God that's what it is to be holy and that holiness is a beautiful thing which as others see it will attract them to know our holy God we belong to God but never for our own benefit always for God's use in his mission as he serves others to bless them God has called us from darkness into his wonderful light so that in a world of darkness we might reflect his light it might bounce off us and some of the light of God's glory might come into the dark places in our city in our streets in our world some of the places

Alistair was praying about earlier once you were now you are we are different than we were you come to Jesus your life cannot stay the same God remakes you in the likeness of Christ by giving you and showing you mercy that we have received God's mercy must must profoundly change our lives or we haven't understood what it is God is giving us and showing us we are new people made new for God's glory by God's mercy the focus of the living stones the living temple the living people is others the living people are living servants the temple where

God is served where others come and get to know God for themselves this is why God makes us into living people let's pray together father we are humbled that you would choose us and make us into your temple and use us to display your glory before all creation set a passion within us to long after this that we would reshape our lives in the likeness of Christ by your spirit work within us and so we pray for one another that the holy spirit would be at work within us make us holy as you are holy make us into priests who serve others make us into living stones who connect others to your presence do all this for your glory we pray in

Jesus name Amen