

Temple & Jesus: Rest and Glory

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- [0 : 0 0] So we're reading from verse 35, so Acts chapter 7, starting partway through Stephen's speech, which is his response to being accused of blaspheming Moses and the temple.
- This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge? This man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush.
- This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for 40 years. This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.
- This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us.
- Our fathers refused to obey him but thrust him aside and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, saying to Aaron, Make for us gods who will go before us.
- [1 : 1 0] As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. And they made a calf in those days and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.
- But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven as it is written in the book of the prophets. Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices during the 40 years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?
- You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your God, Rephan, the images that you made to worship, and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.
- Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern that he had seen. Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers.
- So it was until the days of David who found favour in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for him.
- [2 : 2 1] Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says. Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest?
- Did not my hand make all these things? You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit.
- As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.
- Now when they heard these things, they were enraged and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

And he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him.

[3 : 36] Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

And falling to his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against them. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. Why don't we pray as we come to God's word?

Lord, we always need your help to understand your word. And Lord, I need your help to speak it truthfully and clearly.

So I pray for your help. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, our focus in Stephen's speech today is about the temple.

Now, temple. You might be thinking, what on earth do I care about the temple when I'm not sure when my marriage feels like it's on the rocks, when I feel like my family is falling apart, work is just overwhelming and deeply unfulfilling, and I feel like my mental health is failing me, I feel like my body is failing me, I fear for the health of my family.

[5 : 11] What has an ancient Jewish building got anything to do with what I'm struggling with today? I'll forgive you if you're thinking that.

Em and I have been watching Grand Designs transformations. I don't know if only a few people will be into this kind of show, but these homeowners spend incredible amounts of money going well over budget every time and devoting more than a year of their life.

And like husbands and wives, one of them was asked at the end, it's like, well, we still like each other. Like the stress they're under is enormous that they're going through.

And what are they doing it for? They're doing it for the beauty, the permanence of a family home to dwell in or something to retire in. That perfect place to rest, to thrive as a family.

Now that show, it is rated G or PG. I don't know why it jumps up to PG sometimes, but there's no swear words. There's no violence in it, unless you call knocking down a wall violence.

[6 : 34] But there's nothing inappropriate. But I reckon it's got to be one of the most dangerous shows. It's feeding one of the biggest idols in our society. I can just feel it.

Like I'm starting to look at my house differently. We could put a fireplace. It is dangerous. It is fueling this desire for the perfect dwelling.

And then I came across this week that some new tech people know that Apple are releasing Vision Pro.

Reading the room here. Okay, I got a few nods. Okay, this illustration will benefit one or two of you. So Silicon Valley is promising the capability to create your own rest and glory.

Like Vision Pro, you put on these goggles, you can create the perfect work environment. You're not limited by your desk and a screen. You can stretch it however big you want.

[7 : 37] You can put it there. You can put it wherever you want. You can create your perfect place. You can immerse yourself in movies and memories and you can go wherever you want. You can...

The sound, it surrounds... Technology is telling us we can create our own world.

I think there are two examples in our society with our own hands, with our own capabilities, we want to create the blessings of the kingdom of God, just without a king.

With our own hands, we can create Eden, just cast God out. Even unbelievers, though, critique our attempts at creating rest or anything beautiful that lasts.

Some of you will know Woody Allen, filmmaker, actor, comedian. Just think about his accomplishments in his field.

[8 : 49] He's won four Academy Awards, ten BAFTAs, two Golden Globes and a Grammy and heaps of other nominations. Pretty good.

And he said in an interview, the fundamental thing behind all motivation and all activity is the constant struggle against annihilation and against death.

It's absolutely stupefying in its terror. It renders anyone's accomplishments meaningless. I think he's right.

If, if there's no temple. You're probably thinking, what's that got to do with temple? We are...

He's right in the sense that we are. Aren't we living in a broken world? It's not just this constant struggle against a world that's under curse. It's just this constant struggle. We're all longing for rest and glory because we were made for it.

[10 : 01] And this is where temple comes in. We were made for it. The opening pages of scripture, God says the purpose of his creation on the seventh day, the goal was rest.

God wants to rest with his people. And we saw last year when we went through it, Genesis 2 is this picture of rest and glory. God living with us. Safety.

Abundance. Joyful obedience to God. Harmony relationally. Harmony with the world. Everything in perfect order. Eden.

Paradise. The best thing about it is God is there. That is what the temple pictures. The temple says, God is determined to redeem the rest and glory we were made for.

You'll read about Solomon's temple in 2 Chronicles. Gold is everywhere. It is everywhere. It's the altar was gold.

[11 : 14] The lampstands were gold. The snuffers, the snuff out the candles were gold. Like you've got stainless steel tongs. He had gold. It's just everywhere.

Why? Because it's picturing Eden. Because Eden was just the place of abundance. And gold is in, is overflowing in that place.

It's picturing this Eden. The curtain to the most holy place. Purple and crimson, royal colours, embroidered with angelic cherubim. The ark of the Lord brought in behind the curtain to the most holy place.

Why? Because the king of heaven is present. That's Eden. He's here. The palm trees engraved on the walls of the temple.

Picturing that garden, remembering what was lost. The fact that the temple is in the middle of Israel and Israel encamped around it. God is dwelling with his people.

[12 : 12] He's redeeming paradise. But it's not an easy way back. And that's where the temple also pictures it. But God is providing a way back.

The temple pictures the atonement we need, the forgiveness, the mediator we need to bring us back to God. We've been excluded from Eden because we've all believed the lie that Adam and Eve believed that we don't need to depend on him.

We can control our lives by our own wisdom. We can create paradise without him. The temple shows he's made a way back.

A sacrifice that will cleanse us of all that. A high priest who will go into the holy place and bring us in, represent us for him, for us. When Solomon dedicates the temple, the theme running through his Solomon speech is that when they look to this place that you, God, will hear and forgive.

The temple is a place of forgiveness. Look to the temple and you will find forgiveness. When Solomon finishes his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices.

[13 : 43] And the glory of the Lord filled the temple. And the priest could not enter the house of the Lord because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house. It's rest.

God is here. He's accepted the sacrifice to bring us back. Living in the presence of God, restoring Eden, restoring paradise.

This is the temple that Stephen is charged with being against, being blaspheming, of saying that Jesus will destroy this place.

It is a serious accusation. So as we come to Acts 7, picture where Stephen is standing.

He is in the promised land. He's in the holy place. He's in Jerusalem, the place where God has put his name, where you can meet him. They're either meeting in the temple or very close to the temple.

[14 : 47] And he's standing before the high priest, the one God has chosen to represent him to the people and bring the people to him. Stephen is standing on holy ground.

So is he blaspheming God's holy place? Well, as we go through his speech, and I'm just going to very quick helicopter fly over here.

Is he blaspheming the holy place? He believes that the God of glory appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia.

The glory that filled the temple, he believes. The glory of God appeared to Abraham. He believes the promise to Abraham that he and his descendants will be brought into this promised place.

And we're told in verse 7, and the purpose of that, they'll come out of Egypt and worship me in this place. He believes that.

[15 : 50] He believes that God is the God of Isaac and Jacob. Jacob, whom God appeared to, if you remember that dream that Jacob had, where God met him in the dream of the angels ascending and descending and in Bethel.

And he wakes up and he says, surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it. This is none other than the house of God. He believes in the God of Jacob.

He believes in the God of Moses, that he appeared to Moses at the burning bush. Take off your sandals from your feet for the place where you are standing is holy ground.

He believes God appeared to Moses. Holy ground. He believes, verse 44 onwards, that Moses set up the tabernacle just as God commanded.

It was God's command to set up the tabernacle. He believes that God gave the land to worship him in through Joshua. He recalls the history in language of the covenant with David, verses 46 and 47.

[17 : 01] David found favour in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for him. So David had created peace in the land. He subdued all the enemies.

There's safety now. And he looks at his house of cedar and looks at the tent. The tabernacle was just a tent. This isn't right. God needs a permanent place with his people.

He says, God, can I build you a permanent house? And God goes, no, I'm going to build you a permanent house. Your son, he shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

The forever king will create my house. Stephen is no blasphemer of the holy place.

He's no blasphemer of the holy place. I'm not fully sure what this means but even the council they looked at Stephen and they could see that his face was like the face of an angel.

[18 : 15] Whatever that looked like, I'm not sure what that looked like, but everyone in that room could even see in Stephen that God was showing up right now as Stephen speaks.

God was here in this moment. He's not blaspheming the holy place.

God has set a place for us to meet him. That is the good news of scripture. I want to meet you. a couple of years ago Emma and I or a number of years ago now, but Emma and I had the privilege of going to London and we went to Westminster Abbey.

Beautiful cathedral. the architecture is just amazing. It's designed to feel like you're connecting with the transcendent, really.

And we went to Evening Song where the choir was singing and in Latin I didn't understand a word but wow, wow, it is beautiful.

[19 : 29] It just felt like it felt transcendent. I think that's probably something of the feeling that Jews would have had for the temple.

When you're in this place you're connected with God. From his very first words Stephen exposes their willful restriction of where God's glory is found.

The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia. You're saying the glory of God is found here.

Do you remember our history? He is not restricted to this place. He met Abraham in Mesopotamia near Babylon of all places. Was it the ground of the burning bush?

Was it the dirt that Moses was on that made it holy? Was it the dirt? Of course it wasn't. He was to take off his sandals to remind him he is of the dirt and he's in the presence of the divine.

[20 : 49] What made the ground holy was God turned up there. Wherever God turns up that is holy ground. God's glory was with Israel in a tent in the wilderness all that time.

You're restricting it to this place but God was with our people all that time in the wilderness. Verse 48 the most high does not dwell in houses made by hands.

When Solomon dedicated his temple he says in 2 Chronicles 6.18 Will God indeed dwell with man on the earth? Behold heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you how much less this house that I have built.

Even Solomon knew that God is not restricted to here. and he quotes Isaiah 66 heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool.

What kind of house will you build for me says the Lord or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things? I love Lockie's picture of the Lego like a father with his feet up on a footstool and his son creating this little Lego house.

[22 : 24] All our beautiful cathedrals they're like Lego. What are you going to build for God? He made it all. Not even heaven the highest heaven can contain God.

Stephen is saying you're the one against the prophets by saying that God is restricted to this place.

He is not restricted to this place. He's never been restricted to the temple or the land. He met Ezekiel.

Remember Ezekiel's vision. Those in exile that God turned up he is not restricted. You're the one not listening to the prophets.

Now that is such an obvious truth. Why didn't these experts in God's word why didn't they believe it? Surely surely they understood this.

[23 : 34] I think we Stephen very cleverly I suppose inspired by the Holy Spirit of course he plays on the words of the works of their hands.

They seem to be rejoicing in the work of their hands. All their temple worship appears religious but he's subtly charging them with idolatry.

So back in verse 41 their fathers were out in Egypt they were out of Egypt they were saved but their hearts were still there because verse 41 they made a calf in those days and offered a sacrifice to the idol while Moses was up the mountain and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.

They exchange the glory of the immortal God who's above the ravages of death and decay and they prefer a calf something mortal something they can control They exchange the glory of the invisible God beyond any limitations and they prefer something they can see worship the stars and he quotes the prophet Amos there was a lot of offerings going on but God says through Amos was it really for me was it God can't be mocked he knows that from day one their fathers were worshipping created things why did

God send Israel into Babylon why did God destroy Solomon's temple because Solomon led the people into idolatry king after king there was a few kings who tried to reform but it was never enough it was just trajectory into idolatry the exile proves that Israel repeatedly turned back to rejoice in the work of their own hands lots of worship going on but if it's not listening to God's word then it's idolatry he quotes Isaiah 66 at the end and the context there if you keep reading Isaiah 66 is that God is making all things new their idolatry shows that he's going to have to do something new something special and it goes on to say he who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man he who sacrifices a lamb like one who breaks a dog's neck he who presents a grain offering like one who offers pig's blood these have chosen their own ways and their soul delights their abominations but this is the one to whom

[27 : 09] I will look he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word God is saying through Isaiah I'm going to make all things new and in that day to keep clinging to the old is idolatry do you listen to my word do you and so Stephen charges even the high priest before him your worship of this temple that your own hands have made with all the offerings that your own hands are bringing all the garments that your own hands are putting on it's it's abomination in God's sight because he's done something new you're not listening to the prophets who predicted these days you're not looking to the true son of

David it's not Solomon who gave us the temple remember the end of Solomon's life it's the true son of David who would lead his people in worship in spirit and truth and he uses a phrase that must have just got to the heart of these people you are uncircumcised in heart and ears you are not God's people because your heart and ears you're not listening to God's prophets you're rejecting what God's hands have made take off your sandals and remember you are of the dust well Peter had already pointed this counsel to what God's hands have made if you want to just listen or you can flick back to chapter 4 verse 11 this Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you the builders which has become the cornerstone the capstone the capstone wasn't what I've read about it isn't about it wasn't weight bearing it was picking the perfect stone perfectly shaped and putting it in the perfect position so that the rest of the building could take its pattern from it and be built from that point on but this picture is they looked at this stone

Jesus and it just isn't the shape they were expecting or wanting it's jagged edge it's not the Messiah we're looking for and so they throw it away but even the prophets this is quoting Psalm 118 said this would happen those whom they rejected God has made the capstone his whole house is built on this rejected one his resurrection proves it as we look at Stephen and how he responds we see what the Lord's hand has made in Stephen because of Jesus we see the rest and glory that Stephen has he's losing everything visible everything external his own brothers and fathers are gnashing their teeth at him he's losing the land he's out of the city he's excluded from the temple and he's about to lose his own body he's losing everything and in that moment of death and annihilation he could access heaven itself he could look and see the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God he believed he was in the holy of holies he believed he had a high priest who was standing at

God's right hand not in a man-made temple but in heaven itself he believed that the one who was rejected his sacrifice is all he needs he prays towards Jesus Lord Jesus receive my spirit Jesus is the one who receives prayer now not the temple he's praying towards Jesus knowing that the father hears him the glory that appeared to Abraham he sees it I can see the glory of God when Solomon's temple was filled with glory no one could go in not even the priest Stephen has a glory of God filling him by the Holy Spirit and yet he's losing everything external that is incredible rest and peace and safety even in the face of loss that's what

God's hand has made Jesus you can lose all the externals and still have rest and glory with the promise of so much more to come wow that's what God's hands have made so did Jesus say he would destroy this temple he did speak about this temple but the main thing he said was in John chapter 2 destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise it up but he was speaking about the temple of his body John tells us he was the one who would be destroyed so that we can come in Solomon's temple was built on the mountain where

[33 : 53] Abraham almost sacrifice his only son Isaac as Abraham reached for the knife the angel told him to stop then he sees the ram bought in the bush and that place and that place that's where the temple was built I like how Tim Keller puts it let me quote him the knife of God's justice that did not come down on Isaac and later came down on animal after animal after animal finally came down on God's son that's the sacrifice we need many priests were told did turn to Jesus but this council they couldn't let go of what their own hands have made their whole identity and purpose would have to come crashing down they blocked their ears they drowned out God's word with their own voices they were unwilling to go into eternal life empty handed

I think we see in their example that we can only share in the peace and the rest and the hope the glory of God if we first confess that we like them prefer what our own hands have made aren't I great because of blah blah blah whatever you fill that in we've got to confess that our hearts are prone to that God why would we cling to what we know will one day be destroyed God offers us a place in his house and we see in Stephen a new passion that drives him this peace this rest and the hope of glory he doesn't just keep it to himself it creates something new in him

Jesus creates a kingdom of priests I'm sure if you think of yourself as a priest you're a believer but that's how the New Testament describes us what does a priest do they go into the holy place not for their own sake but on behalf of others they bring people in to God we see that in Stephen even while he's losing all the externals he's so sure that he's got rest and peace and glory and he knows he's going to get much more very very soon matter of minutes for him what does that do in him it creates a priestly spirit he prays on their behalf Lord do not hold this sin against them he wants them forgiven he wants them in he doesn't hold this peace to himself he says behold look look at

Jesus he got arrested in the first place because he just kept annoying people by trying wanting them to come into the rest and glory he's found he goes into the holy place on behalf of even those who condemn him that's the kind of people that Jesus creates that's what rest and glory creates priestly kind of spirit in the context of Isaiah 66 that he quotes God says the sacrifices he wants once he creates everything new he says they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the Lord just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel for the house of the Lord they're the sacrifices so I think

Woody Allen was wrong brothers and sisters who trust in Jesus even in loss and perhaps especially in loss you can point people to the rest and glory you've found and in doing that God uses us as instruments to create a building a living temple that will never be destroyed will you pray with me let's pray Lord I pray that all the blessings you've given us because of what you have done in Jesus I pray that you might press those blessings into whatever each of us are struggling with right now so that we won't look to what the world promises to comfort whatever sorrows we're struggling with but so that we would be filled with peace and hope and joy that we might even see what we're going through as a way to point people to you and life in you pray this in

[40 : 09] Jesus name amen so you