

The Focus of Faith in a Fallen World

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[0:00] It's difficult to understand, interpret at times, but it is a book, a revelation that was given to John in order to help people in a crisis where they were being persecuted for their faith and suffering for being part of Christ's kingdom in the world.

And I guess the book is written on the basis that to encourage people in a time of crisis is to give them the hope that there is something better.

And we'll read through the book of Revelation and we see that quite clearly, that the people of God are encouraged by focusing on the things that are ahead of them and the things that belong to their glory.

And when we read even these chapters themselves, we get the sense of an overarching theme in the Bible. And we see at the beginning of this chapter, he saw a new heaven and a new earth that connects us with Genesis chapter 1, so that there is that overriding sense of the mission of God and of the purpose of God in the whole of the Bible.

Tonight I want us to think for a short time on the focus of faith in a fallen world. I want us to think first of all of the focus on paradise lost.

[1:19] There was, there is a heavens and an earth created by God. In that new, that creation of God, there is a garden.

And in that garden, we see that there is a tree of knowledge of good and evil. We see that there is the tree of life. And we see that there are boundaries in the garden of Eden.

What we want to notice especially is that this garden of Eden was a garden temple. And we read in Genesis chapter 2 that God put man into the garden to work and to keep it.

And when we follow the use of both these words down through the experience of the church, especially in the first few books of the Bible, we do understand that the work is the work of the servants who serve God at his temple.

We understand that those who are the keepers are those who guard, who watch over the temple of God. So we understand from that, that when Adam and Eve are in the garden of Eden, they are there as the first priests guarding the temple of God as God has prepared it.

[2:43] And we see from chapter number 3 that in that garden temple, not only are they there, but there is communion with God which they enjoy.

They hear the sound of the Lord walking in the garden. God is with them in the garden temple. They are present in the garden temple. They are there, created by God as God's revelation of his purpose for humankind.

And in that garden, they have a particular mission. And the mission is to spread the conditions of the garden temple to cover the rest of creation.

Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. So beyond the boundaries of the garden, there is God's creation which they are tasked to fill with people who carry, who bear the image of God.

There is, in that first creation, in the paradise of God, there is God present with his people in God's temple in that garden, where Adam is there to serve, to watch over and to guard, and where he is there in order to spread the image of God to cover the whole of creation.

[4:02] And we know that in that paradise that God created, that the paradise of God's creation became for Adam a paradise that was lost.

We know the story. He ate of the tree that God said you shall not eat of it, because the day that you do eat of it, you shall surely die. And what is the result of that?

Adam can no longer be in God's temple. He can no longer have the commune of God. He can no longer live with God in this garden. And so that he won't reach out his hand and take of the tree of life, God sends him out of the garden, and he places cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the

way to the tree of life.

Adam was there to guard the temple and to keep it, but because of Adam's sin, there's a guard so that he can no longer go in to God's garden temple.

Paradise lost. And when I follow the story of the Old Testament, what I do realise is that that picture of exclusion and of desolation follows me right through.

[5 : 20] And we think of the glorious temple of Solomon. Magnificent in every way. That's something I always sang in Psalm number 48. It's a glorious temple.

It's the temple over which Solomon prayed. The temple that he designed so that the presence of God would come and fill this temple with his glory.

And God did that. We read in 1 Kings chapter 8 that that's what happened. The cloud filled the house of the Lord.

The glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord. It was a temple, a glorious temple. It was a temple where God's presence was found.

But what happens next? We see that the glorious temple of Solomon becomes a heap and a rubble because of the disobedience of the people of God.

[6 : 23] And we see that the agents of Nebuchadnezzar came into Jerusalem. They burned the house of the Lord and the house of the king. They took all the furniture out of the temple.

They carried it away to Babylon. The temple that was the picture, the powerful expression of glory became a symbol of the absence of God and of paradise lost.

And that's what we expect to see. That there is a great beginning as there was in the Garden of Eden. And that there is a sad end because the glory of God has departed.

There is the focus on paradise lost. Let's not forget that. The behavior of God's people down through the Old Testament drives that message home to us.

Secondly, there is the focus and paradise recovered. God's presence is in the tabernacle.

[7 : 34] God's presence was in Solomon's temple. And I will read in the New Testament in John chapter 1 that the word, Jesus, the son of God, he became flesh and tabernacled among us.

The presence of God comes to us. And Jesus is challenged in John chapter 2 with regard to what he is saying. And they ask him, what sign do you show us for doing these things?

His response is key and is interesting. Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. The focus on the tabernacle in the days of the Exodus, the focus on the temple in the days of Solomon is replaced by the focus on the passion of the son of God.

And we see that focus coming to light, first of all, when he experiences what we can say in inverted commas, when he experiences destruction.

The temple of Solomon is in rebel because of the enemies. We go to Calvary's cross and there Jesus is the curse bearer. There he is the one whose body is broken.

[9 : 09] There he is the one whose heart is melting like wax. He is suffering for our sin. He is the curse bearer and he redeems us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us.

The rubble in Solomon's temple becomes the broken body of the son of God on Calvary's cross. Paradise recovered.

The brokenness has to be repeated. The brokenness has to be revealed as to what the brokenness means. And I see that at Calvary's cross. That's what it means.

That's why Adam is not in the Garden of Eden. That's why the children of Israel don't experience the presence of God because Jesus in being made a curse cries out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Paradise recovered. And we follow the story through in the New Testament and the Jesus who is the temple of God and his resurrection, filled with the spirit of God, breathes upon his disciples, receive the Holy Spirit.

[10 : 18] what happens next? In Paul's words, in 2 Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians chapter 3, you are God's temple.

You as a congregation in Corinth, you are the temple of God. Because of your union with Christ, who is the temple of God, who is the cornerstone, the foundation stone, and the capstone, you also are now living stones in the temple of God.

As Peter says, a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifice to God. And tonight, God wants to tell us that we are God's temple.

That in chapter 6 of Corinthians, Paul tells them that as individuals, they are the temple of God and dwelt by the spirit of God. But in chapter 3, it's the collective.

It's the church in Corinth. Tonight, that's what we are. We are the temple of God. The spirit of God dwells us individually.

[11:28] And as the church, the body of Christ, the spirit of God dwells in us collectively. And for the purpose of carrying on the mission of God.

Why are we here? It is because the God who told Adam, go and fill the earth. It's the God who, through Jesus, is telling the disciples, go and make disciples of all nations.

The mission continues. We are the temple of God for the mission of God so that we spread the image of God and the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the temple of God, that we make that known in the world around us.

Paradise recovered. It becomes about persons and people. It becomes about the son of God who died for us and who rose again.

It's about those who come to faith and have the spirit of God dwelling in their hearts. And finally, there is a focus and paradise regained.

[12:39] This is what we want to hear. We want to learn what happened in the past, but we want to hear where we are going. And John in this chapter, he saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.

thanks be to God. All that belonged to the first creation is gone forever. And instead of that, in this new heaven and new earth, we see the church as John saw it.

I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, adorned for her husband. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. We never feel like a bride, do we? In the sense of being the bride of Christ. How could Christ possibly love somebody like you and like me?

But here we are, the greatest marriage event ever, that we are gathered around the throne of God to the marriage supper of the Lamb as a bride, adorned with white clothing, pure and white, because we have been cleansed and washed and made new.

[13:55] And here we are now in the presence of God. And the God who was present in the Garden of Eden with Adam, is now the God who is saying, he will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God.

The bride is the Lamb. God is with them. The covenant God, the covenant purpose of God is now fulfilled. We will leave behind the pain, the sorrow, the mourning, the crying and the tears.

There's that exodus from all of that and there's an entrance into the heavenly kingdom of Christ where we appear as the bride. That should encourage us.

Whatever the crisis is, whatever the challenge is, I keep my eye on where we're going. The paradise regained, secured by the death of Christ. And the remarkable thing or one of the remarkable things about this new heavens and new earth is that there is no building.

There is no temple. And that's what we read in version number 22. I saw no temple in the city. There is nothing in the city that speaks of limitations and of boundaries that there is no need for that.

[15:21] Instead of the limitations and the boundaries that belong to Solomon's temple, that belong to the tabernacle, that belong to the Garden of Eden, instead of these walls and these boundaries which speak of separation, they are gone.

I look for somewhere to, some place to find God and there is no such place because God is everywhere with his people and the Lamb is everywhere with his people.

That's what John says. Its temple is the Lord God, the Almighty and the Lamb. we come to church on the Lord's Day seeking to worship God.

We set ourselves apart, placing a boundary between ourselves and our weekly lives and ourselves and the world in which we live. We set up that boundary.

we are doing it tonight. We are separating ourselves to worship God, to gather together, consider the things of God because that's the world in which we live.

[16:28] We are still in recovery mode but once the recovery mode is over and once paradise is regained, wherever I go it's filled with God.

Wherever I go the Lamb leads me to fountains of living water. I don't need to find a corner where I might find my Saviour to follow him and to drink from him.

He is with me. He is everywhere. The past is forgotten and the future unfolds if we can think of future in God's new heavens and the new earth.

In the past which was so often described as death and decay in all around I see. The present is God and the Lamb in all around I see.

Is that not exciting and uplifting that where we are going all we see is God and all we see is Jesus and tonight that's our expectation and our hope and in the midst of the challenges of life God wants us tonight to lift up our heads to look beyond the scene of time and to look at that great place that great marriage and the presence of God which will never again be broken.

[17 : 58] May God bless these thoughts to us. So we're now going to sing to God away from may may may may may may may may may may