

The \Where\"" of Worship""

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[0 : 01] Worship and church and this is a second week on worship and we're looking at the where of worship today. But I thought I'd start this morning with a story about the first wedding that I ever performed as a minister.

I can still remember their names. It was Adam and Camilla. I also remember being very nervous. So nervous I was having dreams about this upcoming wedding because it was my first one and I didn't want to mess it up for them.

I remember meeting Adam out the back of the church before the wedding and asking him how he was feeling. Trying to pretend that I've done this hundreds of times before. I was the expert.

He mentioned that he was nervous particularly because an ex-girlfriend called Rebecca had turned up. You're kidding I thought. Anyway we proceeded as usual and things went well until we came to the part where I said do you Adam take Camilla?

But instead I said do you Adam take Rebecca? And then I woke up. Now I know it doesn't make for as good a story now it's not true.

[1 : 07] But that's how nervous I was. That's what I dreamt that I did. You'll be pleased to know that the actual day went smoothly. But the reason I'm telling you this story about my first wedding is because I noticed something else on that day.

I noticed that the wedding guests all wanted to stand outside the church building to talk. They didn't want to come inside to talk. Because they felt that the church building was in some way sacred.

And if you did come into the church building then you had to watch what you said. Whereas you didn't have to watch what you said outside. The building was sacred for them. It was the house of God for them.

In fact I remember one girl slapping her boyfriend on the arm as they came into church saying you can't say that. And tuck in your shirt. Now I don't know what he said. But for many of them the church building was sacred.

This is where God lived. This is where you come to worship God. And so you had to watch what you say. But I want to ask is that right? Is this the place we come to meet God in order to worship God?

[2 : 11] Well for Israel the place was the temple. Which brings us to point one on your outlines. The temple was the place you went if you wanted to meet God.

The temple was the place you went to offer sacrifices. The place you would worship God. And we get a glimpse of that from our first reading from Deuteronomy chapter 12. It's on the screen there.

It says you must not worship the Lord your God in their way. But you are to seek the place the Lord your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his name there for his dwelling.

To that place you must go. There bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices and so on. You see the Israelites were to bring their sacrifices of worship to a particular place.

A place where God would put his name. A place where God would dwell. And we know from the Old Testament that that place that God chose was the temple in Jerusalem. And so King Solomon says at the grand opening of the temple in 1 Kings 8 he says, I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you.

[3 : 20] A place for you to dwell forever. You see Solomon builds God a temple to dwell in. And so that's the place people were to go to meet God. To offer sacrifices to worship God.

Because that's where God was. Growing up I went to a Baptist church. I understand there are a number of Baptists here. You're in an Anglican church so you're not going to be too loud.

That's okay. But my wife went to an Anglican church down the road. Anyway, after meeting Michelle, I started going to an Anglican church too. I'd like to say it was because I saw the light but it was because of a girl.

Anyway, the point is to meet with Michelle and to get to know her, that's where I had to go. Because that's where Michelle was. And it's like that for the Jews. To go and meet with God and worship him, they had to go where God promised to dwell.

The temple. And so that's where they went. To offer sacrifices for their sins. So that they could draw near to God and worship God. The temple was the place to worship.

[4 : 23] But the temple wasn't ideal. There were a couple of problems or tensions with it. At first, God was bigger than the temple. You see, God didn't just live at one temple street.

In fact, the Old Testament speaks of the whole earth being just his footstool for his feet. And the heavens his throne. Now we need to understand that the temple is a pretty big place.

Okay, so here's a modern day shot of the wars that have been in disrepair. But to give you an idea of how big each brick is, on the next slide, if this works, yep.

That's how big the bricks are. Okay? So it's a pretty big place. And to give you an aerial shot of, this is actually a model, a scaled model. But you can see the temple dominates the city.

That's the size of it compared to the city. And in the middle of that big rectangle is the temple proper. And then you've got this space around the outside. That's the outer court, which we'll come to in a moment.

[5 : 23] But we're talking big, aren't we? But God, you see, is bigger. In fact, even Solomon knew this. So when Solomon prayed at that grand opening of the temple, he also added these words.

He says, So you see, we have this tension.

The temple was the place for God to dwell, but God was too big to dwell just there. He is spirit, and so he dwells everywhere. The second tension was that although people were supposed to come to the temple to meet God, to worship God, to enjoy God's blessings, it really wasn't easy to get close to God.

And so on this next slide, we have a shot at the front of the temple proper and a diagram looking down from above. And number one, well, that was the most holy place.

That's where God dwelt. Now, the dotted line where number two is, that was a curtain. And that curtain kept everyone out from God's presence, except the high priest.

[6 : 37] Yet even the high priest could only go into God's presence once a year, and never without making a sacrifice for his sin. Why did he have to make a sacrifice? Well, because God is holy, and people are not.

And just like oil and water don't mix, a holy God cannot mix with sinful people. And so sacrifices had to be made. But there were even more restrictions. And number three there was the holy place.

And only priests could go there. Other people couldn't. They were barred from that section. And so they were even further away from God. And number nine was where the Jews could go.

And then the outer court I mentioned before was where the non-Jews could go, people like us. And at number 11 there, between the outer court and the temple proper, there was this sign.

In fact, we still have it today. I'm hoping this, there it is. You can't really read it, but you can see some writing. You wouldn't be able to read it anyway because it's in a different language. But the translation is below.

[7 : 38] And it says this, No foreigner may enter the enclosure or barrier around the temple. Anyone caught doing so will only have himself to blame for his subsequent death. A little different to the sign, all welcome, isn't it?

What's more, no one could draw near to God to worship God without offering sacrifices for their own sins. Why? Well, again, because God is holy and people are not.

And so sacrifices were made to pay for sins. And so there was this huge altar in the temple as well. And sacrifices were made day after day after day.

So on this next slide, there's a scale drawing. And can you see how small the people are compared to the ramp leading up to the altar with a sacrifice? This altar was huge. It would have been a constant barbecue.

And so there's this other tension, you see. The temple was supposed to be a place where people could draw near to God, to worship God, to enjoy his blessings. But at the same time, people couldn't get very near, could they?

[8 : 43] There were all these barriers like a curtain and walls and signs that said stay out. What's more, you had to go through priests and make sacrifices, which were a constant reminder why you couldn't go near your sin.

In other words, it wasn't easy to draw near to God. It would kind of be like me back in my days of dating Michelle, going to her Anglican church to meet with her.

And when I came to the car park, the outer court, if you will, I had to pay money, make a sacrifice to get in. And then when I walked up to the Anglican church itself, the building, there was this big sign that said, Baptist, stay out.

Anglicans only. It's like that with the temple. Although the temple was the place to meet with God, to draw near to him, to worship him, people couldn't do it.

There was curtains, signs, sacrifices, priests, and everything else. So all these barriers. So people needed another temple. People needed a better sacrifice, which would pay for all their sins, rather than having to make them each day.

[9 : 51] One that would enable them to draw near to God, all the way into the most holy place. And that brings us to point two, Jesus, the temple. And it's here I want you to look at your Bibles at John chapter 2, which was our second reading.

John chapter 2. Page 1064. So you might remember as you're turning there that Jesus has just cleared the temple because people were misusing it.

And his actions symbolize that this earthly temple is no longer to be used. In fact, Jesus says he will replace the temple. So let's pick it up at verse 18 in the top of the page there. Verse 18, we read this.

The Jews then responded to him. What sign can you show us to prove your authority in clearing this temple? Jesus answered them.

Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days. And they replied. It has taken 46 years to build this temple. And you are going to raise it in three days?

[10 : 59] Here's the key verse. But the temple he had spoken of was his body. And after he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

See, Jesus says that they can destroy this. He said, destroy this temple and I will raise it in three days. Of course, he was talking about the fact that they would kill him. They would destroy him.

Yet three days later, he would rise to new life. And although the disciples didn't understand it at the time, Jesus is saying that now, if you want to meet with God, you no longer come to a place, but you come to a person.

To me, says Jesus. Because it is only the person of Jesus who enables us to meet God. Because it is only Jesus who dies for our sins and enables us to draw near to God.

You see, before you came to the temple, there were all those barriers. There was walls and curtains. There was priests and sacrifices. But Jesus replaces them all.

[12 : 04] Jesus is the one in whom God dwells perfectly. And Jesus is the priest who stands between us and God. And Jesus became the perfect sacrifice. Jesus replaced it all.

It's no wonder the Sunday school answer is always. Jesus. Yeah. Hebrews 10 puts it like this. It says, therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place.

That's number one. You know where God dwell. By the blood of Jesus. There he is. He replaces the sacrifice. By the new and living way open for us through the curtain. That is his body.

He replaces the temple. And since we have a great priest. He replaces the priesthood. Over the house of God. Let us draw near to God. With sincere heart. In full assurance.

You see how Jesus replaces all those Old Testament things. And enables us to draw near to God. To enter the most holy place. Hebrews says. There's this new appliance out on the market now.

[13 : 10] It's called a Thermomix. Has anyone heard of the Thermomix? Some people haven't. Some people have. I've got a picture of it here. Here it is. Now before, if you wanted a hot meal, right?

You'd have to get out the knife and the breadboard. And cut up your veggies. Then you'd have to get out the pan. And cook all the meat and vegetables in it. And then you'd have to get out another pot. To cook the rice in. Or a rice cooker.

And so you'd have all these things. That you'd have to use to get your hot meal. Well this. Does it all. It cuts. It mixes. It cooks. Voila.

Now I'm not trying to advertise these things. But the point is. Jesus is like a Thermomix. Before there was the temple. The priest. The sacrifice. But in Jesus.

He replaces it all. Do you see? Don't awe me. I work hard at these illustrations. It's made the point now. Isn't it? You've got the idea.

[14 : 05] Jesus replaces it all. And so if you want to come to God. And receive the blessings of forgiveness. And eternal life. Then you must come through Jesus. In fact later on in John's Gospel.

He says. I am the way. To the Father. The truth. And the life. No one comes to the Father. Except through me. Now all this means.

That if we do not come to Jesus. We cannot come to God. If you do not believe in Jesus. Then you cannot worship God. You cannot please God.

And you cannot receive from God. The blessings of forgiveness. And eternal life. And so the most important question for us this morning is.

Have we come to Jesus? Have we put our trust. Our belief. Our faith. In him. Well so far.

- [15 : 04] We have seen that. No longer. Do we come to a place to worship God. But we come to a person. Jesus. But there's one last step. When it comes to the where.
- Of worship. Which brings us to point three. Us. The temple. You see the Bible says. That when we believe in Jesus. Then we become part of God's family. And.
- God's temple. And so we read from. Ephesians. Chapter 2. He says. In him. The whole building is joined together. And rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.
- And in Jesus. You too. Are being built. Together. To become a dwelling. In which God lives. By his spirit. Do you see that?
- Through Jesus. We receive God's spirit. So that. We join his family. And God dwells in us. We become his temple. And in case you're not quite convinced.
- [15 : 59] On the next slide here. We've got a couple other references. Paul writes. Don't you know that you yourselves. Are God's temple. And that God's spirit lives in you. And so if anyone destroys God's temple.
- God will destroy him. For God's temple is sacred. And you. Are. The temple. Or the next one. Do you not know that your body. Is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Who is in you.
- Whom you have received from God. You are not your own. You were bought at a price. The blood of Christ. Therefore. Honor God. With your body. You see. When we believe in Jesus.
- God gives us his spirit. Who unites us to Jesus. So that we become part of the temple. As Jesus. Is a temple. In other words. God's spirit. Lives in us. And so God dwells in us.
- We are part. Of the temple. Now this is not some magical experience. Rather the spirit works. Through our minds and conscience. He convicts us of doing the right thing.
- [16 : 54] When it comes to God. You see. And so when you read the Bible. And think. Yeah. That's right. That's God's spirit. Working you. To convict you. And when you get up on a Sunday morning.
- And think. Oh I really should go to church. That's God's spirit. Working in you. To convict you. And for me. When the kids get up. In the middle of the night. And I prefer to pretend. I'm still asleep.
- So Michelle can get up. My conscience reminds me. That God says. To put my wife first. And so I joyfully. Well. Maybe not joyfully. I get up. And go to the kids.
- But that's. You see. God's spirit. Working in me. That's how God's spirit. Works in us. Through our mind and conscience. But the point is. Because God's spirit. Is in us. Working. Then God dwells in us.
- We are part of the temple. And so this building. That we're sitting in. Here this morning. Is not. The temple. We are the temple. As some people call this building.
- [17 : 48] The house of God. Or the sanctuary. Which are other words. For God's temple. But it's not. It's just a building. It's a great building. It helps us to have church. And we need to look after it.
- But it is not sacred. Like those people. At that wedding thought. I know of a minister. Who got in trouble. Because he suggested. Having a tea and coffee. At the back of his church building. And the people were furious.
- Not because it might make a mess. Which might be a good reason. Not to have it. But because they thought. It was sacred. They said. You cannot have tea. Or coffee. In God's house.
- I was there. I heard them say it. But you see. This building is not sacred. We are. Because we are God's house. God's temple. And that's why Paul says. On that top reference there. That God will destroy those.

Who destroy his people. Because his people. His temple. Are sacred to him. We are precious to God. But it also means. That if this building. Is not God's temple.

[18 : 43] Then we don't have to come. To this place. To worship God. Like the Israelites. Had to go to that place. In Jerusalem. To worship God. Rather.

We are God's temple. And so we are always. In God's presence. And we can always. Worship God. Everywhere. We go. That's why Paul says. Down in the second reference there.

That we are to honor. Or worship God. With our bodies. Wherever we go. Because God's spirit. Is always in us. We are always in God's presence. Do you see how broad.

Worship is. Last week. We saw that. Worship. It was not just. Singing. Though it includes that. It's not just coming to church.

To do that. But it includes that. Rather. Worship is bowing our lives. To God. In adoration. Our whole lives. Worship was serving. Him. With obedience.

[19 : 36] In our whole lives. It was fearing God. With reverence. In our whole lives. And that included. Not just how we responded. To God. But how we treated. People. I don't know.

If you got to see that. Last week. In other words. Worship is honoring God. With our whole lives. By loving him. And loving our neighbor. Sounds familiar. Doesn't it? And we would worship God.

Like this. Everywhere. We go. Because we. Are in the temple. We are the temple. And more than that. We ought to worship God.

Like this. Wherever we go. Because he is God. But he is also the one. Who gave his only son. As a sacrifice. For our sin. That we might have forgiveness. That we might have eternal life.

That we might have his spirit. Who makes us his precious people. His holy temple. And so we ought to worship him. With our whole lives. Wherever we go. I'm going to wrap up.

[20 : 30] And pray in a moment. But there is one final question. Which is on your outlines there. That arises out of all this. If we don't need to come to church. To worship God. Because we can worship him everywhere.

Then why come to church at all? Now please hear me. There is a good reason. There are many good reasons. Why we should come to church. But that's next week. So.

Do come to church next week. And hear why you made a good choice. To come. But for now. Let me pray. Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father.

We do thank you. For the Lord Jesus. We thank you. That he is. Our hope. Our righteousness. We thank you. That he. Was our sacrifice.

Who gave his life. And took your judgment. Upon himself. That we might be forgiven. And given. Eternal life. And your spirit.

[21 : 31] Who makes us. Your temple. And so knowing this. Father we pray. That you would help us. To worship you. Wherever we go. Acceptably. With reverence. And awe.

We pray these things. In Jesus. In Jesus name. Amen.