

“In My Father’s House”

***The Theme of TEMPLE from Genesis to Revelation -
What the Bible is All About From Start to Finish***

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Sermon Title: *In My Father’s House*

Sermon Text: Revelation 21:3-4

Scripture Reading: John 17

January 16, 2011

Introduction

T - Trinity

E - Eden

M - Moses

P - Poetry & Prophets

L - Lamb

E - Eden Excelled

Why don’t you read your Bible more than you do? We have talked about this problem lately in sermons and in the Sunday School class. We know how vital the Word of God is to the Christian. Just read Psalm 119 if you have any doubts – 176 verses long, all on the value of the commandments, the Law, the Word of the Lord. *“I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.”*

What would you say if someone asked you this question – ‘Just what is the Bible all about anyway?’ Could you answer them directly, understandably, and in 10 to 15 minutes? Or would you answer be vague and non-specific?

Or, what if their question was – “What possible application to me and my life could an old book like the Bible have?”

Let me suggest to you that all of these questions, and more, are quite related to one another. That one reason we do not read our Bibles more diligently, more profitably, and with more praise and adoration given to God as a result of our reading, is that fundamentally most Christians do not have a real ‘handle’ on what the Bible is really all about. And because we do not know what the Bible is all about – what “the Big Story” is – *neither do we fully understand what in the world God is doing. And people who do not know what their God is doing, are a people who are not able to fully see His glory, His might, His love, His being.* To hunger and thirst after Him, as David put it. Nor can we adequately share that hunger and thirst with others.

This morning, as we return to our study of the Gospel of John, we are setting out to remedy this ignorance – at least in ourselves. Here are our goals –

- 1. That every person here be able to know and explain the “big story” of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation – in 10 to 15 minutes or less, leading someone on a “walk through the Bible” using specific Scriptures on the way.**
- 2. That our Bible reading and study would be brought to new “life” as we find ourselves able to “fit” every part of the Bible into the whole, and thereby being enabled to more accurately apply the Bible today.**
- 3. That our knowledge of and love for the Lord would intensify as we more clearly fathom just what He has done, is doing, and will do for us in Christ.**
- 4. That our practical, daily obedience to Christ (practical holiness) would increase as our love for and knowledge of Him grows.**

More About Our Problem

Listen to the problem identified and discussed by others who have seen it –

“Which passages would you choose if you were devising a series of Bible studies on the theme of the temple?” It was an innocent question from a young man I had just met at a conference for trainee ministers. I was about to start at college. Within two years I would be let loose on a church, and I was far from ready. I had been a committed Christian for 6 years, but my knowledge of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, was very limited – which explains why my new friend’s question unnerved me so much. I had heard of the temple, but I did not really know what its significance was, and had no idea where to look in the Bible to find out more; so I stalled: ‘Which passages would you choose?’

In the next 10 minutes I was taken on a whistle-stop tour of the whole Bible that left my head reeling. We began in the garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve did not need a temple because God’s presence was everywhere; and traveled to the new creation, heaven, where once again there is no temple ‘because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple’ (Rev 21:22). Along the way we made brief stops at the tabernacle in the wilderness; the temple in Jerusalem; the new-temple prophecies of Ezekiel; the Lord Jesus Christ who “tabernacled” among us (John 1:14 literally); and the church (a holy temple in the Lord, Ephesians 2:21).

I was very impressed. I had already completed a theology degree at university, but it left me unable to find my way around the Bible. There had been detailed analysis of individual books and passages, but no-one had shown me how they fit together. My friend, however, was able to travel through the Bible with apparent ease. It was as if he was using a map while I was left without any sense of direction.” -Vaughan Roberts, God’s Big Picture – Tracing the Storyline of the Bible

Are your “wheels” turning yet? I provide these observations of others to help you better grasp what our purpose is in presenting this series. And to show you your need! Here is more –

“The Sunday school anniversary service has just begun and the hall is packed with children under the watchful eyes of teachers and parents. They all sing lustily with the help of an accordion and a couple of guitars, while the song leader conducts energetically from the platform. The children’s eagerness for the Bible story soon to be presented is not shared by the young man sitting on the platform and nervously thumbing through his assorted illustrations and flash-cards. Perhaps more thoughtful than most, he is seized by a sudden doubt about the application he intends to make from the Old Testament story he is about to tell. There is nothing wrong with his visual aids, and his story telling technique is recognized to be of a high standard. There is something which bothers him. How is he to take those far-off events of 1,000 years or more before Christ and make them say something to his youthful hearers of the 20th century?”

This uncertainty is not a sudden thing. Let us suppose our friend (call him Ken) is someone who has been brought up in a Christian home and a live, Bible-based church. Over the years he has been well taught the contents of the Bible and has learned a way of applying these to his own Christian existence, assumed to be the only ‘proper’ way. As a Sunday School teacher he gradually acquired a skill in this kind of application, but was never quite sure of the principles behind the method. But through an interest in biblical studies he began to be aware of the variety in the literature of the Bible as well as of the historical context of its events. Not that he shared the doubts of some of the books he read as to the inspiration of the Bible, but he did become aware of the rather haphazard approach to both the original meaning of the text and to its application to the ‘here-and-now’ which he previously accepted.

The invitation to speak at the anniversary service has faced Ken with a new problem. He cannot simply rehash the story in accordance with the lesson material of their Sunday School curriculum (not that he was very happy with that material anyway!). His uneasiness about the method of telling a Bible story was intensified a couple of weeks previously when he listened to another speaker at a children’s rally present the story of David and Goliath. It had been well done and the children loved it. There had

been lots of excitement in the play-acting of that great victory by God's chosen leader, and the use of visual aids had been carried out with care and precision. But Ken was most troubled by the way the speaker had applied the story. The fellow dressed up as Goliath had progressively revealed a list of childhood sins by peeling cardboard strips off his breastplate one by one, as the speaker explained the kind of 'Goliaths' we all have to meet. Then a strapping young David had appeared on cue, and produced his arsenal – a sling labeled 'faith' and five stones listed as 'obedience,' 'service,' 'Bible reading,' 'prayer,' and 'fellowship.' The speaker had omitted to say which stone actually killed Goliath, a matter which caused a little mirth when Ken discussed the talk with some friends. But underneath the mirth was a real sense of uneasiness and confusion over the matter of how such an Old Testament story should be applied.

Ken was troubled by all this because, 6 months ago, he would have done exactly the same thing. But now as he prepares to take the platform he is very unsure about it all. He has come to appreciate more of the historical unity and progression of the biblical events. Somehow the ingenious jumps from Goliath to our sins, from David's weapons to our faith and Christian virtues and, more significantly, from David to ourselves seems at the one time both logical yet arbitrary. Any wonder Ken is still troubled. He is about to give a talk which leans heavily on the same kind of approach and which seems to say something valid without clear reasons for its validity.

This story could be written 1,000 ways to fit your situation and mine. If you are not a Sunday School teacher, you are a camp counselor, a holiday Bible club helper, or maybe just an ordinary Christian struggling with the question of the relevance of the Old Testament [or, if we are honest, of the WHOLE Bible!] to your Christian life. Or you are a Christian parent who wants to lead your children towards a sense of the meaningfulness of the Bible, and towards a maturity in the handling of the text of Scripture. Every time we read the Bible we meet this problem of the RIGHT application of the text to us, the meaning of the ancient text to today's world. [Graeme Goldsworthy, Gospel and Kingdom]

If WE Christians are not clear on how the Bible really applies to us, to our lives here and now, how good of a job are we going to do in presenting the gospel to the lost? What if much of the world's criticism of the Christian's irrelevance to life is well-founded because we have gotten the application of the gospel wrong? That is to say, often the lost are not really presented with the gospel – at least not in its fullness – but with a “cheesy” and cheap version? What IS the real message of the David/Goliath account and how does it “fit” into what God's Big Picture is? If we don't know, then we don't know what God is really up to, and if we don't know that – we simply cannot “see His glory” or know Him as we should. Our worship will tend toward shallowness – to match our shallow interpretation and application of His Word.

One day, a weak and anemic understanding and application of the Scriptures will cease to satisfy, as our children advance in age. The childishness of such a shallow Christianity will be increasingly understood to be inapplicable and irrelevant to their lives. God's glory, as it is diminished by our ignorance, will be marred and hidden from them, and they will either choose to continue to live a façade of faith, or more likely, begin to look for truth elsewhere.

These are not SMALL things we are turning our attention to in this series then. They are matters of eternal life and death.

“I have heard many a preacher say, ‘Christians know all they need to know about the truth. It's living it that is the problem.’ Yet year after year I discover that the students that churches are sending to Bible college (some of their most dedicated) and even those coming to seminary do not know that much about their Bibles.

Certainly, living the truth we already know is a challenge. But it's hard to be challenged by truth we don't know! Too many of us are living on a subsistence diet of Scripture – and wonder why our strength is small. How do we receive motivation to live through difficulties, to face struggles, to avoid temptation, if it is not by a keen understanding of the Word of God?

Yet, when it comes to the first part of the Bible, most people are lost. Oh sure, they know and enjoy some individual stories such as those of David and Goliath, Joshua and the battle of Jericho, Noah and the flood; but few have put them together to understand to understand what the Old Testament is all about...and where it is going. I believe most Christians would like to know their Bible better. They would like to be motivated by its message. Yet, when they look for help to understand it, they are often weighed down with facts and dates and names and places. They conclude that understanding the Bible must be a dull and tedious task.

And then there is Jesus. Does the front half of the Bible relate to Jesus? How? Except for a few specific predictions, like Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 9, even most Christians aren't really sure." [Albert H. Baylis, From Creation to the Cross – Understanding the First Half of the Bible].

Do you begin to identify with all this? Ending your Bible study devotional time with a nagging thought of “so what?” or trying to convince yourself that *somehow* this must apply in *some way* to me – but really without a clue as to how? We need to remedy this problem and today we set out to do it.

My Father's House

We have entitled this series In My Father's House, taken from Jesus' own words in the 14th chapter of John –

John 14:1-3 ESV

- (1) "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.
- (2) In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?
- (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

John 14:1-3 NBLH

- (1) "No se turbe su corazón; crean en Dios, crean también en Mí.

(2) "En la casa de Mi Padre hay muchas moradas; si no fuera así, se lo hubiera dicho; porque voy a preparar un lugar para ustedes. (3) "Y si me voy y les preparo un lugar, vendré otra vez y los tomaré adonde Yo voy; para que donde Yo esté, allí estén ustedes también.

As we proceed with the series, I think that you will come to understand the reason for this title – it relates of course to this matter of the TEMPLE as a recurring theme of the Bible – the temple as the house of Jesus' Father -

John 2:14-17 ESV

(14) In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there.

(15) And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.

(16) And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade."

(17) His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

John 2:14-17 NBLH

(14) En el templo encontró a los que vendían bueyes, ovejas y palomas, y a los que cambiaban dinero allí sentados.

(15) Y haciendo un látigo de cuerdas, echó a todos fuera del templo, con las ovejas y los bueyes; desparramó las monedas de los que cambiaban el dinero y volcó las mesas.

(16) A los que vendían palomas les dijo: "Quiten esto de aquí; no hagan de la casa de Mi Padre una casa de comercio."

(17) Sus discípulos se acordaron de que estaba escrito: "EL CELO POR TU CASA ME CONSUMIRA."

A Simple Tool

To help us remember how the Big Picture of the Bible develops, we are going to learn a simple acrostic tool. By using it, you will be able to be

like the “tour guide” that Vaughn Roberts was so impressed with and helped by years ago – because like him, you too will have “the map.” Here it is –

T - Trinity

E - Eden

M - Moses

P - Poetry & Prophets

L - Lamb

E - Eden Excelled

We will be coming back to this tool repeatedly in this series until everyone has it carved into their memory! For now, let me give you just a quick overview of it – hopefully to motivate you to learn it for yourself.

From Eden to Eden...and More

Let me quickly show you that the Bible IS a unity, that there IS a Big Story, that God has been, IS, and will be carrying out His great Story from eternity past to eternity future, and that the Bible therefore is not simply some depository of miscellaneous and assorted stories and letters. Furthermore, let me show you that this Big Story is about TEMPLE because it is about God’s great purpose, for the manifestation of His Glory to all creation, *of wanting a people – adopted by Him as His children – to come and reside with Him in His house. The Lord Jesus Christ is, of course, necessarily central in all of this – the Scriptures are about Him. He is the means by Whom all of this is possible. Here is the Father’s great desire stated –*

“Revelation 21:3-4 ESV

(3) And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. (4) He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death

shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Revelation 21:3-4 NBLH

(3) Entonces oí una gran voz que decía desde el trono: "El tabernáculo de Dios está entre los hombres, y El habitará entre ellos y ellos serán Su pueblo, y Dios mismo estará entre ellos.

(4) "El enjugará toda lágrima de sus ojos, y ya no habrá muerte, ni habrá más duelo, ni clamor, ni dolor, porque las primeras cosas han pasado."

The dwelling place of God is the TEMPLE – and therefore as we trace the theme of TEMPLE from Genesis to Revelation, we are going to follow the Big Story of the Bible.

Listen to this theme way, way back in the Old Testament – (these are by no means the earliest. As we will see, the story begins in Genesis) -

Leviticus 26:11-12 ESV

(11) I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you.

(12) And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.

Leviticus 26:11-12 NBLH

(11) 'Además, haré Mi morada en medio de ustedes, y Mi alma no los aborrecerá.

(12) 'Andaré entre ustedes y seré su Dios, y ustedes serán Mi pueblo.

Jeremiah 31:33 ESV

(33) But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Jeremiah 31:33 NBLH

(33) "Porque éste es el pacto que haré con la casa de Israel después de aquellos días," declara el SEÑOR. "Pondré Mi ley dentro de ellos, y sobre sus corazones la escribiré. Entonces Yo seré su Dios y ellos serán Mi pueblo.

See it? I will walk among them. I will be their God. You will be my people.

This is why, in our little acrostic tool – TEMPLE – there are TWO Edens. The Bible opens with Eden – where God walked with Adam and Eve in uninterrupted fellowship. Sin had not yet separated. And the Bible ends with Eden (and that fellowship) *restored and even surpassed*. God once again manifesting His glory, man once again glorifying and enjoying God, in such a perfect union that the TEMPLE in a sense will not even exist anymore because the TEMPLE will be EVERYWHERE. And all of it, of course, is accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ who once “templed” among us.

To see that in fact the Bible begins and ends in Eden, all you need to do is read the first 3 chapters of Genesis, and the last two chapters of the Bible, Revelation 21-22. And you will see it. Paradise Lost, as John Milton put it, but Paradise Regained in Christ.

Conclusion

Heaven, the New Creation – is the Father’s House in fullness and perfection. Right now, as we are going to be seeing in more detail, the body of Christ – the Church – in union with Him, is the Father’s House.

Ephesians 2:19-22 ESV(19) So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, (20) built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, (21) in

whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

(22) In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:19-22 NBLH

(19) Así pues, ustedes ya no son extraños ni extranjeros, sino que son conciudadanos de los santos y son de la familia de Dios.

(20) Están edificados sobre el fundamento de los apóstoles y profetas, siendo Cristo Jesús mismo la piedra angular,

(21) en quien todo el edificio, bien ajustado, va creciendo para ser un templo santo en el Señor.

(22) En Cristo también ustedes son juntamente edificados para morada de Dios en el Espíritu.

And here is the deal – here is why it is soooo vital for us to understand the Big Story of the Bible –

Real life, life as God intends it to be, is only found in Christ in the Father's House. Outside the House, there is darkness and death – slavery. Inside there is light and life and freedom with perfect access to the Father. Inside the house there is genuine love and holiness – perfect relationship with God and man. Outside the house there is – well, just read your newspaper.

And THIS is the incredible thing – God has sent out invitations throughout the world to every people and nation – to come on inside through the only Door – His Son. To come inside, out of the darkness, to come inside and come to life and know Him face-to-face.

THIS is what the Bible is all about, and THIS is why we keep seeing this theme of TEMPLE – God desiring to dwell with His people, be their God and they His people – right on through the Bible. It really is the Big Story of the Bible into which all the separate pieces of the Bible fit and make sense. Relevant? Is the Bible Relevant? Well -

“What is the home of your dreams? If you are...

- *an Eskimo living in an ice hut*
- *a Chinese living in a bamboo hut*
- *an African living in a mud hut*
- *a homeless person living in a newspaper hut*
- *a tenant in a project*
- *a president in the White House*
- *a celebrity living in a penthouse*
- *an orphan living in a foster home*
- *a prisoner in a cell*
- *a beggar with no house at all*

We all have dreams of what home should be like. Do you dream of a home you can never go back to, or a home you can never have? Do you dream of a home with love and laughter and loyalty, with family and fun and freedom? Do you dream of a home where you are accepted, encouraged, and challenged, forgiven, understood, and comforted? Do you dream of a home that never was, or a home that never will be?

When did your home begin to unravel? Have you been blindsided by divorce or death or disease or depression or a thousand and one other difficulties that have turned your dreams into a nightmare?

There is hope! The home you've always wanted, the home you continue to long for with all your heart, is the home God is preparing for you!” [Anne Graham Lotz, Heaven – My Father's House].

It is the Father's House, you see. Ever since sin entered this world in Eden and we were evicted from the Father's House, (and even before), God has been working on a New Eden, a New House – it is “the place” Christ says He has gone away to custom build for His people. It is the House, the Home, the Family every one of us never truly had. And it is paid for.

This is what the Bible is all about. This is the gospel. This is what every Christian must understand. This is what we are calling TEMPLE.