

Sermon – 27/07/2008 pm

City with No Temple

Study Text: Revelation 21:22-27

The temple in Jerusalem was the focus of worship for the Jews. Every Jewish male was supposed to go up at least once a year with his tithes and offerings. He went to make sacrifice for sin. God determined the place for his presence to dwell among his covenant people, and that place was in the Most Holy place of the temple in Jerusalem.

With the coming of Jesus all this changed. Jesus gave himself as the all sufficient and final sacrifice for sin. Animal sacrifices became redundant. Moreover, in Jesus Christ God came to dwell in a glorious new and living way among his people. God no longer dwells in the temple built by man.

Challenged by Jews as to his divine authority Jesus said *destroy this temple and in three days I raise it up* (John 2:19). They thought he was talking about the temple it had taken 46 years to build, but the inspired gospel writer tells us that Jesus was speaking of the temple of his own body.

The apostle Paul speaks of Christ as the chief cornerstone holding together the building which is the holy temple of the Lord (Ephesians 2:21). The temple is made up of the people in whom God dwells individually and corporately. The community of the redeemed, the church of the Old Covenant and New Covenant is pictured as the New Jerusalem, the dwelling place of God.

John pictures the New Jerusalem merging with the temple, or more specifically the temple engulfing the city and the whole world. All evil has been removed with Satan and his cohorts being cast into the lake of fire. Only the Most Holy place of the temple remains – hence the shape of a cube.

No Temple

Whilst the temple was the central feature of the earthly Jerusalem there was no temple in the New Jerusalem in John's vision. Rather, the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple (21:22). What was the purpose of the old temple? It was for worship yes, but worship involving animal sacrifice. There were lots of priests and the High Priest who took blood and sprinkled it on the mercy seat on the Day of Atonement.

All this was made obsolete in Jesus Christ. Our High Priest is now at the right hand of God in heaven (Hebrews 8:1). He entered the Most Holy place by his own blood, the blood of the once for all sacrifice for sin. Christ has gone through the heavens to minister for us in the heavenly temple. This temple will come down out of heaven from God one day soon. Jesus will come again, and God the Father will also make his home in the midst of his people. *Behold the tabernacle of God is with men and he will dwell with them* (21:3).

The Pope made a mockery of this truth, misleading thousands of young people into seeing him as some sort of divine figure. How presumptuous to drive through the streets to be

worshipped by poor ignorant people. The Bible says fix your eyes on Jesus and flee all who would divert your gaze from him. How presumptuous for men to assume the authority of declaring who will be saints or not – all on the basis of their works of course. Where do we find such things in the Bible?

The Lord and the Lamb are its temple. ‘What about the church being the temple’ you may ask? Paul spoke of the assembly of God’s people, the church, as the temple of the Lord. John also saw this city-temple as the bride of Christ, which is the church. But in each of the pictures, note that Christ is included. He is the cornerstone, the foundation, and the temple itself. It is the holy temple because it is the dwelling place of God and all who are washed and made holy in Jesus Christ.

No Sun or Moon

The city had no need of the sun (21:23). Some contend that the sun may still be present – there was just no need for it. They do so with the understanding of continuity from the old heaven and earth to the new heaven and earth. But this is to miss the point of the vision. God did of course put the sun into the heavens to give light by day, but this was on the fourth day of creation. He said ‘let there be light’ on the first day. The point is that the glory of the Lord and the Lamb in this city-temple removes the need for any other light, even the intensely bright light of the sun.

Isaiah spoke in the same way about the coming glory of God and the fact that the sun would not be needed. *The sun shall no longer be your light by day...but the Lord shall be to you an everlasting light (Isaiah 60:19).* How amazing that these two men of God living some 800 years apart spoke the same truth. They did so because the truth of God is unchanging. They were men inspired by God when they wrote this.

This is truth that encourages and comforts the people of God in all ages as they wait for the coming of the Lord. Thousands around us live in fear of the sun in the sky burning up, or of the earth heating up and affecting their life here on earth. Looking to the Son of God puts all such fears into perspective. God who put the sun in the sky will one day take it away and he himself will illuminate the new heaven and new earth with his glory.

No Shut Gates

That the city-temple had gates at all is somewhat puzzling in this vision. Is this city-temple not all that remains after the wicked are destroyed and the old earth and heavens have passed away? John speaks of nations walking in the light of this temple and kings of the earth bringing glory and honour into it (21:24). Some argue that this picture of open gates points to universal salvation, while others say that this is the millennial city of Jerusalem. But this vision points rather to the universal knowledge of God.

All the earth shall hear the salvation of God. Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. The community of the redeemed will come from all nations and from the four corners of the earth. The coming of the wise men to Bethlehem to worship Jesus points to this great truth. There will be Gentiles as well as Jews in this redeemed community experiencing the wonderful glory of God and the Lamb.

The gates of the old Jerusalem were shut a night to keep out the enemy. Since there is no more night in the city-temple coming down out of heaven the gates will not be shut at any time. Moreover, since the enemy is destroyed there is no need to shut the gates for protection. The gates will stay open, symbolizing openness for the nations to bring glory and honour to the King of kings and Lord of lords, to the throne of the Almighty and the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world.

No Defiling

The previous vision ended with the declaration that all the spiritually unclean, all unforgiven sinners, will be excluded from the holy city just as the physically unclean people were excluded from the earthly temple. Those who had touched a dead body or in some other way had defiled themselves were not allowed to enter the earthly temple.

Anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire (20:15). The Book of Life comes up again in this passage. This time it is called the Lamb's Book of Life. And this time it is mentioned positively. Only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will enter this city-temple. No wonder Jesus reminded his disciples to rejoice above everything else that their names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20).

Whilst this vision is encouraging and comforting to those in the church who remain faithful, there is this solemn warning to those tempted to go the way of the world, those tempted to take the easy way, the way that satisfies the flesh, and worship idols. Worship of idols probably involved ritual prostitution.

Lies are among the things that defile the holy temple. Liars are excluded (21:8, 27, 22:15). All idols and other gods are lies. There is only one God, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. All who worship idols are liars. God is a God of truth. Lies are an abomination to him.

The gates are open for all who repent of their sin and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is by faith and faith alone, that names are written in the divine register. They are written by the Lamb of God for it is his book. They are written in his blood for it is by his blood that our sins are forgiven and we are made clean and holy before God.

'Choose this day whom you will serve' said Joshua. 'As for me and my house we will serve the Lord'. We will serve the Lord looking forward to the heavenly city, the city whose walls are called salvation and whose gates are called praise (Isaiah 60:18).

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