

God's War Memorial: The Church of Jesus Christ
Ephesians 2:11–22 | 10.08.2017 | More Than You Can Imagine

If you travel throughout Europe today, you will find in cities across Germany and Switzerland monuments dedicated to the leaders of the Reformation.

For instance, there's a famous statue of Martin Luther in Wittenberg, Bible in hand, the other hand pointing to the text of Scripture.

In **Geneva** . . . the 4 pillars of the Reformation in that city are remembered in stone—there's **John Calvin** (the key Reformer in Geneva), **William Farel** (the man who brought Calvin to Geneva), **Theodore Beza** (the pastor-theologian who followed Calvin), and (John Knox a disciple of Calvin who brought Reformation truth to Scotland).

Even in **Iceland**, where the Reformation touched down in the 1540s, the largest church is named Hallgrímskirkja . . . after the famous poet-priest Hallgrímur Petursson . . . whose poetry about Christ's cross unified a nation.

Such memorials are important because they teach future generations about the past, and they (should) provoke conversation about what happened in the Reformation

In many ways . . . this sermon series has also been a memorial, as we remember the five solas of the Reformation . . .

In **Ephesians 1:1–14** . . . we saw that God's glory alone stands at the center of the gospel

In **Ephesians 1:15–23** . . . we learned how all things have been put under Christ's feet . . . and thus how the gospel centers on the person and work of Christ alone

In **Ephesians 2:1–7** . . . we delighted in the good news that salvation is by grace alone

And In **Ephesians 2:8–10** . . . we saw that faith alone is the way we receive God's grace.

And now this morning . . . as we come to Ephesians 2:11–22 . . . where we find the fifth sola . . . which is arguably the First Sola . . . the belief that the gospel is contained in Scripture alone.

In other words . . . when **Ephesians 2:17** . . . says that Christ himself proclaims peace to us . . . we believe that the risen Lord preached the gospel through his Spirit to his church

Maybe it's better to say . . . Christ has created his church through the proclamation of the gospel . . . which centers on his death for sinners and his resurrection which gives his people . . . a new life by the Spirit.

In fact, **Eph 2:20** . . . even speaks of his apostles and prophets as the foundation of the church – i.e., inspired by his Spirit . . . Christ has proclaimed the gospel to us thru them

In this way . . . we see in this passage biblical warrant for trusting in Scripture alone . . .

But really . . . there is something else in this passage that should have our attention.

And it is the War Memorial God has created . . . and spread throughout the world.

Indeed . . . it is Christ's temple . . . the one created by his death and resurrection.

And . . . the one which testifies to the grace God to save sinners

And which testifies to the power of God to destroy his enemies

Indeed . . . if we learn anything from the Reformers . . . we must learn to go back to the sources

The Protestant Reformation depended on a recovery of the gospel . . . which depended on a recovery of the Bible . . . and the Bible in its original languages.

Indeed, throughout the Middle Ages . . . the Scriptures were veiled from the people.

And worse . . . they were veiled by false translations of the Bible.

For instance . . . the sacrament of marriage depended on a mistranslation of the word *mysterion* . . . instead of being translated mystery . . . it became sacrament

Likewise . . . the sacrament of penance depended on a misunderstanding of *metanoia* – the command to repent.

But in the days before Luther . . . a few new biblical translations came out . . . and with them a keen attention to the original languages . . . and hence the meaning of the G

In this way . . . the call of the Reformers was always *Ad Fontes* – to the sources.

And thus . . . the Reformers bestowed upon the church what they learned from the apostles

Namely . . . a great and glorious confidence in God's Word

And a commitment . . . to go back to the Bible to understand what it originally meant.

And this morning that is what we must do . . . and why this morning's message is part one of two on **Ephesians 2:11–22**.

For in these verses . . .

We find more than proof text for Sola Scriptura . . . and message of saving grace.

We more fundamentally find . . . a definition of the church . . . as God's blood bought people who bear witness to the world as a War Memorial over the demonic powers.

But to see THAT . . . we need to see the argument Paul is making in chapters 1–3 . . .

That is . . . we need to understand the context of Ephesians 2 and its surrounding.

Then from there . . . we need to see why Paul is using a temple to describe the church.

So let's dive in at verses 19–22 . . . and then follow the ripples in chapters 1–3.

First, notice how emphatic Paul is in verses 18–22 about the temple of God. **READ vv. 18–22**

In these words, Paul begins by explaining (v. 18) how we have access or invitation into the presence of God in the Spirit because of the work of Christ.

This is what he just described in vv. 13–17 . . . and now he is focusing on what Christ's atoning death accomplished – namely the construction of Spirit-filled temple!

Notice what he says in vv. 19–22

In v. 19 . . . he speaks of the church as God's household or house.

In v. 20 . . . he describes Christ as the cornerstone of this house, with the A & P as the foundations stones and believers as living stones

in v. 21 he talks about the whole structure is joined together and growing –
IOW – this temple is not a small and stationary; it is growing into the cosmos

And for that reason, Paul can turn to the Ephesians in v. 22 and say to the Christians in Ephesus . . . and in him **YOU** . . . also are being built together

As I read Ephesians 2 . . . vv. 19–22 become the evident GOAL of the chapter.

Everything Paul says about salvation in Ephesians 2:1–10 . . . everything he says about Christ's peace-making in Ephesians 2:13–18 . . . are given to show what the Father, Son, and Spirit are building in the church.

In short, God is building a temple that will fill the earth and bring glory to Christ.

And . . . as Paul explains . . . this temple IS the church of Jesus Christ, created by his cross, which created a new humanity made of J & G.

Indeed . . . to the people of Ephesus . . . who are inundated with the demonic powers associated with Artemis' temple . . . Christ's temple goes to war against Artemis' temple.

And as we've mentioned . . . this warfare worldview fills the letter to the Ephesians . . . and its something we must see in order to understand why Paul focuses on this temple.

So . . . to see that . . . let's go back to Ephesians 1.

In that chapter . . . Paul prays for the believers that they would have power to believe . . . with the same power that raised Christ to life and set all things under his feet

In that prayer . . . Paul highlights the way Christ is exalted and seated in heavenly places.

As a refresher . . . lets **READ vv. 18–23.**

So here . . . Paul calls our attention to Christ's exalted place in heaven.

Then in ch. 2 . . . He explains how believers are also seated in the heavenly places.

Verse 5 says that by grace, God has made us alive in Christ, raised us up and seated us in heavenly places.

Thus . . . Paul envisions Christ with his people, raised to life and seated with him in heavenly places.

Now . . . It may be a little cloudy as to what it means to be seated in heaven, when our feet are still touching earth . . . but verses 11–22 are going to help us.

In these verses Paul explains how God is creating one new man from Jews and Gentiles who were previously enemies of God.

In other words . . . through the cross of Christ . . . God is reconciling a people to himself and to one another . . .

And together . . . when Jews and Gentiles and people of all races, ages, preferences . . . are joined together in a local assembly . . . what we call a church . . . they display to the world God's power & wisdom.

That is to say . . . while Christ is exalted in heaven . . . his church displays the power and wisdom of heaven in their earthly life of grace, peace, and kingdom living.

This is the flow of thought in chapters 1 and 2 . . . and it is confirmed with chapter 3.

In that chapter . . . Paul explains the mystery of Jew and Gentile united in Christ.

AND, . . . he explains how the church displays the power and wisdom of the gospel.

In other words, to a watching world filled with devils . . . the church is God's memorial displaying Christ's victory over the grave . . . over sin . . . over his enemies.

Now . . . the first 3 chapters of Ephesians are absolutely glorious . . . and they help us understand so much about God, the gospel, and grace. . .

But they also teach us about God's church . . .

What the church IS . . . what we're supposed to do . . . and HOW we are supposed to do it.

But still . . . I think the concept of the church as temple needs some further background.

Which is to say . . . we need to go back to the OT sources . . . and seek to understand what the Bible says about temples . . . and why when Paul describes the church as a temple to display God's glory . . . he doesn't call them a billboard . . . but a temple.

In other words . . .

If we can agree . . . that Paul focusing keenly on the church as God's holy temple.

We need to ask . . . WHY? What does he see . . . that maybe we don't?

Is this just a nice metaphor . . . or something more.

Well . . . to answer that question we need to go back to the Old Testament . . . where there are two temples God built.

There is the **Tabernacle** . . . constructed by Bezalel . . . a Spirit-filled man from the tribe Judah.

There is the **Temple** . . . constructed another Spirit-filled man from the tribe of Judah . . . Solomon.

In both instances . . . the dwelling place of God is what resulted after God defeated his people's enemies and made a covenant with his people.

Or turned the other way around . . .

There is in Scripture a pattern of a kingdom warfare leading to temple-building pattern.

In this pattern . . . God raises up a leader to save his people by defeating the enemies, after which God makes a covenant with them . . . and in turn constructs a temple.

So In **Exodus** . . . God raises up Moses . . . who is used by God to defeat Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt . . . after which God makes a covenant w/ Israel and the tabernacle is built

And in **Samuel** . . . God raises up David . . . who is used by God to defeat the nations and conquer Jerusalem . . . When this conquest occurs and God grants Israel rest from war . . . God constructs a house for David . . . and David's son builds the temple for God.

Do you see the pattern?

In our day . . . we might understand the historical power of these stories . . . but I wonder if get the symbolism of God's temple? **I mean . . . this is why the temple was built!**

In the **tabernacle**, God gave Moses a vision of heaven . . . from which he gave a "blueprint" for Bezalel to construct.

In short . . . the tabernacle was meant to symbolize on earth . . . God's throne in heaven.

In the **temple**, this blue print was enlarged . . . like Moses, David received the lay out, then Solomon carried out the construction . . . such that the God of heaven had come to live with his chosen people Israel.

So . . . we know that the temple was a symbol of heaven and the God of heaven dwelling with his people on the earth.

In both temples then . . . the priest (who was on earth) went **into the heavenly places** when he entered the holy of holies . . . only he couldn't stay there, he had to come out.

But now for those in X . . . we have can't leave God's heavenly precincts B/C we have been seated with X . . . and together we have become the very dwelling place of God.

Do you see how looking at the temple typology helps us get a handle on Ephesians?

And we are not through . . . because we are not just called to be a hiding place for the Spirit on earth, . . . Rather, like the temples of old . . . we actually display the power of God on earth.

In other words, while the old temples communicated vertical truth about heaven.

It also communicated to horizontal truth . . . that Yhwh was better than any other gods

Now let me insert . . . The Bible teaches there is one God . . . and Yahweh is his name.

But it also teaches that there is a whole realm of angelic beings . . . what Paul calls powers and principalities . . . and they too are called gods – Psalm 82 or 1 Cor. 8

And in the OT . . . these so-called gods waged war against Israel . . . and God himself waged war against them . . .

And it's just not possible to fully grasp the story of the Bible without this concept of spiritual warfare.

And even more . . . we can't understand fully Paul's words in Ephesians 2 . . . unless we understand how temples played a part in this warfare.

For instance . . . here's a famous example in the Old Testament.

In the days before King David. . . when Israel went to battle the Philistines in 1 Samuel 5 . . . we find the Philistines capturing the ark of Yahweh in battle . . .

And when they did. . . **what did they do?** They set it up in Dagon's temple . . .

Why? What is the symbolism?

The act shows the power and might of Dagon over Yahweh . . .

Just as ISIS rebels post videos of the men they have decapitate. . . so ancient societies boasted of their might by putting their enemies under their feet and their god's feet.

And where was are a god's feet ?? **In the temple!**

Now . . . of course . . . the rest of the story tells how Israel's God decapitated Dagon and knocked him to the ground.

Go read 1 Samuel 5 and then reenact with your kids.

But when you do . . . know that this is a competition between gods . . . and a competition between temples!

So here's the point . . . we have to WORK HARD to grasp the polytheism of the OT and NT . . .

But if you lived in the world of the OT . . . what is called the ancient Near East . . . or you lived in NT Ephesus . . . it would come natural . . .

Temples were built to honor the god or gods who won a victory for his people.

In this way . . . these temples were war memorials . . . and when one nation defeated another . . . what was the first thing that went . . . the temple!

The destruction of a temple indicated a subjection of a people and their god.

Here's Jeffrey Niehaus puts it in his book *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Bib Theo*:

A god [little 'g' gods] work[ed] through a [king] to wage war against the god's enemies and thereby advance his kingdom. This king [would be] in a covenant with the god, as are the god's people. The god establishe[d] a temple among his people, either before or after the warfare, because he wants to dwell among them. [And he wants his people to worship him; and the people want to worship him because he will fight for them]. . . (30)

If you put all this together . . . you have a fivefold pattern

God sends a King . . . a **king** goes to war and **conquers** by the god's power . . . this leads to a **covenant** of trust with the god . . . and this is memorialized with a **temple**

So . . . while we have to study history to understand this concept . . . those in Ephesus did not . . . it was second nature . . . especially with the temple of the war goddess Diana.

So when Paul speaks of the church as a Spirit-filled temple

He is not only indicating how this temple improves the previous OT dwelling places

He is also saying that this temple is Christ's work of victory put on display.

Indeed . . . in a way that the Ephesians would have understood completely . . .

Paul says . . . Christ's death and resurrection has created a new humanity

And this humanity stands as a living, moving, worshiping temple that is growing in throughout the world . . . and that has come to be established in Ephesus

READ vv. 19–22 . . . So . . . as this temple plants itself in Ephesus . . . and around the world . . . it becomes a visible testimony to the way X is gaining ground on the earth.

Or at least . . . in creation of a new humanity from the dust of death . . . he is showing how he has won the victory over sin, the law, the grave, and the devil.

Church . . . this is what the temple imagery of Ephesians 2 is drawing on . . .

And it is so vital we see it . . . because everything that comes after it depends on it.

But more than that. . . and here's the application for us today . . . **seeing the church as God's**

Victory Temple . . . enables us to embrace who we are in X and what our church is.

IOW . . . by paying attention to the temple we learn our **identity, community, mission.**

Here's what I mean . . .

In verses 11–12 . . . Paul commands us to remember who we were before Christ.

Before God made us alive with Christ and seated us in heavenly places = in his temple ...

... we were separated from God, alienated from God's promises, w/o hope and w/o God

But when God's grace saved us . . . he gave us his new life and a new place to live.

Dwelling in Christ . . . therefore gives us a new identity that fills and thrills our soul.

Such a new found identity is the foundation of a new way of living in Christ.

At the same time . . . when 3 or 300 Christians gather together . . . this identity in Christ creates a new community . . . just as Paul says in v. 15 – **from the two God has made one new man.**

Positionally . . . the church is the temple where Christ dwells by his Holy Spirit.

But practically . . . this temple community will look like the one whom they live with.

This is always how it goes . . . your lifestyle will reflect the one you worship; you will become like what you love . . . and you will join yourself to people who love the same.

It's the principle of immersion . . .

If you want to learn a language or love a people . . . you must go and live in that culture.

JTS If you want to learn Christ . . . you must go and live in his culture.

Where is that ??? It's in God's Temple ... which is experienced in the local assemblies of people who identify with Christ.

In this way . . . community becomes the necessary outgrowth of identity with Christ.

It's impossible to identify with Christ and not identify with his people.

And thus identity . . . leads to community . . . and community shaped by identity overflows into mission.

Meaning . . . the concept of church as holy temple is not a separation movement from the world.

No . . . unlike the barricaded temple of Israel . . . this temple is mobile, agile, and hostile

Hostile to the demonic powers of this age . . .

In this way . . .

We are called to display God's power . . . so that the enemies of God would know they are defeated . . . and so that men and women ensnared by the enemy might be set free.

Indeed . . . the church as God's victory temple is not proud or self-seeking.

It is the way God has planned to share his good news with the world.

Personally . . .

. . . we remember how God rescued us and we share that good news w/ others

. . . IOW . . . we call the world to community with Christ by means of identifying with him . . . through faith in the gospel.

That's our temple mission . . . and it becomes second nature when we put a priority on assembling with a community that prioritizes Christ above all else.

Indeed . . .

. . . that is my hope and prayer for OBC

. . . that in Woodbridge Virginia . . . unbelievers wouldn't need to go see the Reformation memorials of Europe to see Christ and his good news . . .

Rather . . . they would see in us . . . a temple of people unified by Christ's death and resurrection . . . seeking to be a visible witness to God's love and holiness.

Indeed . . . this is what Paul was writing to the Ephesians about . . .

And it's what the Holy Spirit also says to us . . .

To that end . . . let us walk . . . and pray to the God of this temple.

The church should not be defined by any sociological study or religious poll.

No . . . the church is created by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And in Christ and through his peace-making work on the cross . . . he created a new people who are covering the earth . . . and who are gathering in places like this.

Indeed . . . local churches bring into view the universal church . . . which is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

And unlike the OT temples which were made of wood, cloth, and stone . . . this temple is made of flesh and blood . . . raised to life and indwelt by the Spirit of God.

It's for this reason . . . we are committed to Scripture alone as our authority . . . and guide . . . because it is the word of the gospel that saves sinners and builds the church.

So . . . if you are here today . . . and you don't know Christ as your peacemaker

The Word of God is beckoning to come . . . lay your sins before him. Stop building your own temple . . . stop fighting for yourself and fighting against your Maker.

Instead . . . come, receive the invitation to be a part of his temple. Forsake your idols and your sins and find rest in his promises and love in his presence.

Let Christ – his death and resurrection – pay for your sins.

Let his life be your identity . . . his love be your security.

Friend . . . every other god will promise you the world . . . and lead you to death.

Only Jesus came to die for you . . . so that he could give you a place in his world.

That's the message of Ephesians 1–3 . . . and it is available to any and all.

At the same time . . .

If you have trusted in Christ . . . the Word of God presses you to go deeper in him.

To find your **identity** in him, your **community** with him, and your **mission** from him.

Indeed . . . this will be our focus next week

As we get on the ground in Ephesians 2:11–22, we will see how God intends for Christ to inform and reform every aspect of life.

But for now . . . let me preview that message with three applications for today.

First, Christ's temple gives us identity . . . we can see this in vv. 11–13.

Whereas before Christ, we were separated from God, strangers to him, aliens to the covenants of promise . . . now in Christ we have been given every spiritual blessing.

Indeed, the believer is not lacking anything. Rather, we are full to overflowing with God's love and life.

And thus, we must learn who we are in Christ . . .

Second, Christ's temple gives us community . . . and we can see this in vv. 13–18.

In the church we find people of every background, every social class, every nationality.

And this community must begin to define who we are.

In the church there are no divisions . . . and thus we must let our identity in Christ – not our preferences or worldly practices define us.

Instead . . . it is the pattern of gathering, worshiping, serving, and loving one another that must mark us.

The rest of Ephesians will give us all sorts of practical steps here. But first we must see how God has made us to fit with other who are in Christ.

Third, Christ's temple gives us a mission . . . and we can see this in vv. 19–22.

We are not just a dwelling place for God . . . we are a holy dwelling place.

Therefore, our lives should reflect the character of the God who saved us.

And more than that . . . if we have been saved from the world to shame the evil spirits of the world . . . we should aim to live our lives such that God's power is seen.