

Introduction

Five years ago Dawnae and I went with a group of men and women connected to Calvary Church to the land of Israel. It wasn't your typical "see the sights" type trip but was intended to be a ten-day spiritual encounter with the living God. And it was! We did see some sights...and a lot of rocks. Rocks everywhere. When Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey the Pharisees were angry and told him to rebuke the crowds for they were calling him "the King who comes in the name of the Lord". Jesus responded that if they were silent then *the rocks* would cry out. That's a lot of crying out.

We were in Jerusalem for our last couple days there. The temple mount *is massive*. It's been said that if it hadn't been torn down a few years after it was completed, the temple in Jerusalem would have been one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The so-called "Western Stone" is believed to be the cornerstone to the entire temple mount. This single cut stone is over 44 feet long and 11 feet high. Since it's built into the foundation no one knows how wide it is. Given the two dimensions we know, it's likely 6–8 feet wide, having an estimated weight of more than 250 tons—that's more than 500,000 pounds!

Though the temple has long been destroyed, the temple mount is simply amazing to experience. We saw many sights like this but the one that truly sticks out to me is Shiloh. You may recognize the name from our series in Joshua. When Israel first entered the land we read in Joshua 18 the tabernacle was set up at Shiloh. Think of that! The entire point of the exodus from Egypt, of making a covenant with the people of Israel, of rescuing them and claiming them as his people was the tabernacle! The aim of what God was doing in the ten plagues and leading them through the wilderness and sustaining them even as they rebelled against him repeatedly was that he might dwell among them in the tabernacle.

Here's a picture of Shiloh today. As you can *clearly* see, the tabernacle stood on the right edge of the clearing. For over 300 years this was the place God's presence was manifested on earth. Here, on this very location, the God of the universe dwelt among his people in the tabernacle. Only the high priest on the Day of Atonement could enter into his presence, yet his presence was right there.

Here's a close-up of the actual site. In the foreground you can see the outline of where the outer edges of the tabernacle stood. Israel camped around here and brought their sacrifices here and worshiped the God of Israel here. What an amazing gift that God gave his people, that they might draw near to him! Again, the tabernacle stood here for over 300 years!

This is perhaps the saddest place in the world. In Psalm 78 we're told God was provoked to anger by the

people's idolatry so he forsook his dwelling at Shiloh. You may recall the story. The Philistines captured the ark of the covenant. They quickly returned it for God brought judgment upon them, yet the tabernacle would never be the same. Years later Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem and God's presence was manifested there, in the Most Holy

Place. Israel continued its rebellion, however, so God gave them this warning about their temple:

Jer 7:12 Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel. ¹³ And now, because you have done all these things, declares the LORD, and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, ¹⁴ therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh.

Jeremiah 7:12–14

Surely in that day Shiloh looked much the same as it does today—and perhaps less so, for archaeologists have set up the stones in the outline of the tabernacle. The only evidence that God dwelt right here for more than three centuries is...*rubble*. When God spoke those words to Israel, this is what would have come to mind. Any blessing brought by the presence of God was utterly gone. Just rocks *everywhere*.

It is no surprise, then, that God promised a new covenant and declared a significant way in which the new covenant will be different from the one given at Mount Sinai.

Jer 31:31 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ For 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. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Jeremiah 31:31–34

The covenant at Sinai had a fatal flaw: it included unbelievers. One simply had to be born into the right family to be included in the covenant. There are no natural-born children of the new covenant. The promise is every member of the new covenant will know the Lord. Further, God will write his law on their hearts. That is, he will so completely transform them they will never be forsaken. In a real sense, in the new covenant God takes the approach that if you want something done right, you have to do it yourself, so he does. We see more of this approach in our text for this morning. We’re in Ephesians 2.

Eph 2:19 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

Fellow Citizens

Paul begins with the words “so then”. What he’s about to write is rooted entirely in what he has just written. The work of Christ was to tear down the dividing wall of hostility that separated the nations and prevented them from coming to God in faith. His blood destroyed this wall of hostility. To remind you, here’s a picture of the reference Paul was making. The temple mount was massive and could hold a substantial number of people—easily 150,000! The temple proper was the large structure near the middle of the temple mount. In this second picture you can see the “soreg”—the dividing wall of hostility. This wall indicated the closest point Gentiles could get to the temple. The gates through this wall had signs warning that any Gentile who attempted to go through the gate would be responsible for his own death, which would immediately follow.

Paul says Jesus has broken down in his flesh this dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances. This means he fulfilled the covenant given at Sinai and fulfilled its laws and brought in the new covenant that is not based on laws but is based on his Spirit who causes his people to become more like him. It is through the body and blood of Jesus that people from every tribe and language and people and nation can be reconciled to God.

Notice the language of citizenship Paul uses. First, because of Jesus they are no longer strangers. That is, they are no longer foreigners with no rights or privileges. “Strangers” in the ancient world were those who were just passing through. The best they could hope for was to not have any trouble, but if they did, they had no recourse. There was no one to whom they could appeal to for protection, for they had no rights. The Gentiles who believe in Jesus are no longer strangers with no rights.

Further, they are no longer aliens. Aliens were those who lived in an area, perhaps even for centuries. Because they were not citizens, they lacked the protections and rights of citizenship. He or she have *some* rights, but not the full rights of citizenship. Aliens were tolerated and could even be productive members of society, but they were never “in”. Paul says they are no longer aliens. Across the empire there were a number of Gentiles who were called “God fearers” by the Jews for they no longer worshiped the various false gods but worshiped the one true God, yet because they did not convert fully by embracing circumcision, they remained outsiders. They often attended synagogue yet they were outsiders. In Christ this is no longer the case.

Instead, he says they are *fellow citizens* with the saints. They are citizens in every way the saints are citizens. There is no distinction between them and their fellow citizens. There is no ranking among them, for they are all equally citizens, with all the rights and privileges and responsibilities of citizenship.

Notice carefully Paul does not say “with Israel” here. He does not say they are fellow citizens *with Israel*. Instead, they are fellow citizens “with the saints”. The saints are believers in Jesus, regardless of national origin or cultural expression or political party or skin color. They are those from every tribe and language and people and nation who trust in the Lord Jesus. They are together citizens of God’s kingdom.

Paul then suddenly shifts his metaphor, so as to prevent the idea that the church of Jesus is a physical nation tied to physical land. He says the Gentiles who believe in Jesus are members of the same household of God. In the ancient world a household could be

substantial, with extended family members and slaves counted among the members of the household. Paul has already obliterated the notion there could be such rankings within God's household, for they are *fellow citizens*. There is not a hierarchy in God's household as there would be in an ordinary household.

In an ordinary household there was the land owner at the top, with his wife and children, extended family members, and household servants, who often were slaves. He was the undisputed ruler of his domain. His sons would be his heirs and his daughters would be expected to marry and join someone else's household. This is why Paul calls them—male and female—*sons* in chapter 1: “In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ” (1:5). To be a son was to be an heir. In Christ, we are all heirs of God. We each will inherit everything that belongs to our Father, men and women alike. He's simply using the categories of the day to communicate in a way they would understand.

Notice also that there are no natural-born sons of God. This is why they are fellow citizens *with the saints* and not *with Israel*. This would imply they had to join Israel and to join Israel as a people would require adopting their cultural norms including circumcision, Sabbath-observance, and food laws. Though the Gentiles had once been “strangers to the covenants of promise” they are no longer.

Built

In verse 20 Paul continues his metaphor of the household of God. He says the Gentiles who believe in Jesus are members of the household of God, *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets*. It is likely he means more than the Twelve Apostles plus himself and more than the Old Testament prophets. We have an excursus coming up in April about the difference between office and spiritual gift. The Twelve, Paul, and the Old Testament prophets were each directly called and appointed by the Lord to fulfill these specific offices. These offices were limited to just them. In the new covenant, however, there are those who are gifted in these areas while lacking the authority possessed by those in the office.

There were, of course, *the* apostles, but they were joined by other gifted church planters like Barnabas and Timothy and Silas and Andronicus and Junia and Apollos. Today we'd use the language of “church planter” or even “missionary” to describe them. They were directly involved in starting new churches.

There were also prophets. These were men and women who proclaimed God's truth to others. They were not the same as Old Testament prophets. When an Old Testament prophet spoke, the people were to obey—*period*. That is why, if the prophet were shown to be false, he was to be killed. In the new covenant Paul says the local church is to test the words of prophets to see if they are in alignment with Scripture and therefore truly from the Lord. There is no indication that one who speaks prophetically in error was to be excommunicated, for the *gift* of prophecy functions differently from the *office* of prophet.

Paul says the household of God was built on the foundation of the earliest apostles and prophets in the church. They proclaimed the gospel and the word of the Lord and built up the church. While they were foundational, notice what Paul says next: “Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone”.

A cornerstone was essential to a building project. If the cornerstone were not square, for example, or if it were not laid properly, the building would not be square and would not

be stable. The cornerstone was essential to the entire building. Here Paul is indicating the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets was the gospel of Jesus. The entire household of God is built on the gospel of Jesus.

In verse 21 the whole structure of his church is *joined together* on the foundation of the proclamation of the gospel, which is centered in Jesus Christ. If you take away the cornerstone the entire structure collapses. It is essential that a local church is built on the gospel, which is the proclamation of who Jesus is and what he has done. Take that away and you no longer have a local church. You may have a group of people but you no longer have the household of God.

As these building pieces are joined together on the foundation and according to the cornerstone, the structure grows into a holy temple in the Lord. Keep Paul's metaphors in mind here. Christ has torn down the dividing wall of hostility that existed in physical form in the physical temple in Jerusalem. This wall kept the nations from coming too close to God. In Christ that separation has been destroyed. In Christ, all have been brought near to God, and not merely past the former barrier. In Christ all have been brought into the direct and immediate presence of God.

We experience this in a profound way when we assemble together in the name of Christ. He promises that when we do, his presence is manifested in a unique and powerful way. *God is here* right now in a way that he was not here yesterday and will not be later today. Because we are the temple—that is, we *together*—God is present and there are no barriers for any of us.

The word Paul uses for “temple” refers to the Most Holy Place in the temple proper. Only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place and he could only enter one day a year and only after an elaborate purification ritual. There was a massive curtain that blocked the entrance to the Most Holy Place. First-century Jewish historian Josephus wrote that it took 200 men with ropes and pulleys to remove that curtain for cleaning and replacement. When Jesus died that curtain tore from top to bottom, indicating the way to God had been opened through his flesh. The real dividing wall of hostility—the curtain blocking access to God—was truly torn down.

God's Dwelling

As men and women turn to Jesus in faith and repentance they become the very building blocks of the church Jesus said he would build. They aren't a physical building but an assembly of those who worship Jesus. They grow together into the temple, the Most Holy Place where God himself dwells.

In verse 22 Paul tells the Ephesian believers this is true *of them*. Just like men and women all over the world, they, too, are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Notice the church is still being built. As God saves people from every tribe and language and people and nation, his church grows. Paul doesn't mean simply there are more of them. Rather, they grow into a dwelling place for God.

Back in the beginning God created the world to be the place where he would walk with those he made in his image. God desires to walk with humans. Adam's sin broke this and ever since God has been working to restore the world to be the place where he would walk with his people. As a local church grows God's dwelling place on earth grows.

All over the world are these little outposts of his kingdom, his embassies in foreign and hostile territory. He works to grow these outposts and will continue to do so until he takes over the entire world. On that day the Lord Jesus will recreate the heavens and the earth and the entire earth will be God's dwelling place.

Rev 21:2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 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 21:2-4

The aim of God's work in this world today is this: to dwell among his people. This is why he is building his church by building local churches. One day the *whole* church will assemble with the Lord Jesus and all will be well. All the promises will find their fulfillment in Christ. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 1:20, all the promises of God find their Yes in Jesus. Though Gentiles were once strangers to the covenants of promise, they are now fellow citizens with the saints, full-fledged members of the household of God.

Notice there Paul said *covenants* of promise—plural. All of them. In the garden of Eden God promised that one day Eve's offspring would destroy the serpent. In Genesis 12 God promised Abraham all the families of the earth would be blessed by his offspring. In Genesis 15 God made a covenant with Abraham, guaranteeing these promises to his offspring. In Exodus 19 God promised Israel they would be to him a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. In 2 Samuel 7 God made a covenant with David, promising his offspring would be seated on an eternal throne. In Isaiah 7 and 9 God promised a virgin would give birth to a son and he would be called Immanuel for he will be *God with us*. In Zephaniah God promised the day was coming when he would sing over his people, rejoicing in them. In Amos God promised he would restore Israel and bless his true people.

Then, at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, James declared God had fulfilled the words of the prophets—*prophets*, plural—and he cites the prophecy of Amos. He said God fulfills this promise when he saves people from every tribe and language and people and nation. Because Christ is the True Offspring he fulfills all these promises. All who are *in Christ*—not "in Israel"!—all who are in Christ are therefore recipients of these promises as well.

No Hierarchy

Because all who are in Christ receive the promises fulfilled in Christ, there are no second-class citizens in his kingdom, and there is no hierarchy in his kingdom. There is the Lord Jesus and all his adopted sons, who inherit everything with him. I love how Steven Baugh puts it.

Hence, for Paul to say that his Christian Gentile audience (which included slaves) were fellow-citizens with the saints would have communicated what a

stunningly elite privilege God has bestowed on his people in Christ. What is far more stunning is when Paul shifts from the political metaphor to say that God has included believers in his very family as his “family members” (οἰκεῖοι). Graeco-Roman families included widowed or orphaned relations, one’s freedmen and slaves, and were therefore often quite large. Believers, however, are not included in God’s family as slaves or even freedmen, but have all been adopted into the household as sons and therefore as his heirs and coheirs with the eternal Son.

S. M. Baugh, ECC

This is why Paul repeatedly emphasizes in his letters there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female. He doesn’t mean there are no distinctions for we are gifted differently and called to serve differently. Some will be elders and some will be deacons. Some will serve in the nursery and some will serve on the worship team. Some will serve behind the scenes and some will serve in more visible roles. Nowhere does Scripture suggest we’re all the same, but here we see *there is no hierarchy*. There are no second-class citizens of God’s kingdom.

We—the broader Western Church—often create such classes. Some are treated differently for superficial reasons. In some churches to be single is to be deficient in some way and so single people are treated as a separate group of people until they join the ranks of the married—completely ignoring Jesus’ own teaching. Some are treated differently on the basis of their particular temptations. For some reason we tell those who struggle with same-sex attraction if Jesus has truly saved them they wouldn’t struggle with it anymore, yet we don’t say to J-T that if Jesus has really saved *him* he wouldn’t be tempted with pride or laziness or anger any more.

We often treat those who are poor as a mission field, as those who ought to be recipients of our kindness and generosity, rather than those who also have a responsibility to participate in the ministry of the local church and therefore have gifts and abilities with which to serve the body of Christ. If we aren’t busy ensuring second-class citizens understand their status, then we’re busy making sure the upper-class folk know they’re upper-class. Thankfully this isn’t an issue here at New City but many churches put their lead elder on a pedestal and treat him as if he were truly special. He’s *God’s anointed* and so the best you can hope for is he knows your name.

We see this sort of stratification when we think only vocational ministry is ministry. Whether you’re called to serve as a vocational elder or a deacon or you work for a non-profit in Christian ministry, or you lay bricks for a living, God calls you to use your vocation for his glory. There’s nothing more essentially holy about serving a church as an elder versus serving a church while working as an accountant or as a factory worker. We tend to categorize and prioritize certain types of work as holy and others as...not holy. These types of categories easily become the basis for unity—or might I say, *uniformity*.

This is the real problem with churches that pursue something other than the Lord Jesus as the basis for their unity. Whether it’s a church’s ethnic majority or the majority political persuasion of the congregation or their preferred musical style or whatever it is, when that thing becomes the basis for the church’s self-identity, that church is declaring that this shared characteristic is greater than the blood of Jesus.

What unites us as the body of Christ isn't that we all have college degrees or high school diplomas. It isn't that we all work white collar jobs or blue collar jobs. It isn't that we all vote the same way. It isn't that we all love the same sports teams—or even that we all love sports. It isn't that we eat the same sorts of foods or embrace the same cultural expressions. What unites us as the body of Christ is the cornerstone on which our faith is built. Because we are all built on the foundation that is Jesus, there can be no hierarchy, no second-class citizens in God's kingdom.

Application

Try to imagine living in a city of over 200,000 people and running into construction *everywhere*. Imagine a city where entire streets are blocked for months at a time because some construction company needs a place for its precious cranes—as if the need for a stupid crane is greater than your need for convenient travel. This was the city of Ephesus in the first century. It was Rome's second-largest city and was experiencing a construction boom that would last a couple centuries. By the early fourth century it would be about a half-million people.

When Paul uses the language of building, they understood what it entailed. Paul isn't writing about some ordinary construction, however. He specifically says the Spirit of God is the builder. He is taking his building materials—those who trust in Jesus—and builds them into a dwelling place for God. This new temple made up of his people is continually growing in size. It is in this temple we encounter the real and active presence of the God who created the universe.

I've seen the temple mount in Israel. It's impressive. The stones are massive! It's difficult to fathom how people without machines could move them into place—let alone cut them so precisely. There was no mortar used to keep them in place! Only the precision of the fit between stones held them there. As impressive as the temple was in the first century, it only lasted a few years. It was torn down by the Romans shortly after it was completed.

The largest building in the world at the time was the temple of Artemis, right there in Ephesus. It was a massive structure. Today the only thing that remains standing of this massive temple is a single pillar that has been reassembled. There is only one temple that is guaranteed to last forever, and it is still being built.

I am ever saddened when I hear of those who treat the church as a duty, the thing you're supposed to do on Sunday mornings. We hear this in the language of “going to church” when the truth is we *are* the church. We often treat the Sunday morning worship service as a time to gain some knowledge about Christian living or maybe a time to be inspired to face whatever the coming week brings. Do we understand what is really happening when we assemble in the name of Jesus?

Each week we light the Christ candle. Some of you who are newer may not know why we have this candle. In Revelation John uses the imagery of lampstands. Lampstands are local churches that proclaim the gospel of Jesus, for he is the light of the world. When you enter this auditorium on Sunday mornings and see this candle burning, you ought to recognize what is about to happen. When we assemble in the name of Jesus God enters into his temple. We are his temple!

When we gather together on Sundays we experience God's immediate and direct presence. God will never forsake his church like he forsook Shiloh. His church will never be destroyed like the temple in Jerusalem. At the same time, our attempts to reach God on our own will end up just like the temple of Artemis. God has come down to do the very thing we would not and could not do, and the result is his temple is being built.

As impressive as the stones used in the temple mount are, they are nothing compared to the stones God is using to build his temple today. God's work today is seen in Suzy and Darryl and Scott and Jessica and Calvin and Michelle and Casey and Jake and Dan and Jill and Adam. Week after week we show up to meet with the God of the universe who dwells among us. We participate in our City Groups for the same God who shows up in his gathered assembly work in and through us as we serve one another. When we meet together to share a meal together at the Brewery or we have a cup of coffee at Sparrows or we watch the game together, the Spirit of God is ever at work in us, forming us into his temple.

Being God's temple, his *people*, is necessary a corporate experience. You are not *individually* God's temple. We *together* are God's true temple. This means you cannot faithfully follow the Lord on your own for the Spirit of God is building us into a dwelling place for God, and he does this in community. Paul says in verse 22 in Christ we are *being built together* into God's temple. A building is made up of individual stones but none of these stones is the building. They *together* constitute the building.

We must be that temple together. We must participate in life together as God's Spirit works among us to make us more like Jesus. We must recognize there is no hierarchy, no second-class citizens. Each one of us is an essential piece of the temple God is building. This means each one of us must commit to being part of this body and must commit to participating as fellow citizens and as members of the household of God. We must be his true temple.