

Creekside Community Church
Hero: Jesus in the Old Testament
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A Place for His Presence: Jesus in 1-2 Kings

Each year our High School group went to Hume Lake, which is a Christian camp in *Kings Canyon National Park*. I know that many of you have been there. Hume is like the *Disneyland* of Christian camps. Everything there is over-the-top. Hume always had the best speakers; the best worship bands; the best theatrical productions; the best competitions; the best facilities; the best looking girls. Hume was the best. It was a little slice of heaven on earth. And when we were at Hume, we were close to God. And that's why we went; to grow "*closer to God.*" And each year, we had this amazing experience. But after awhile, I began to notice a pattern. We'd go up to Hume. We'd have this amazing spiritual experience. And we'd confess sin. We'd recommit ourselves to Christ. And we'd make these insane vows, like, "*starting today, I'm never going to lust again, ever.*" And when we left, we were on fire for Jesus. But then we drove down the hill. We left heaven and came back to earth. And by the time we'd reached that first stop at *In-N-Out*, the strong emotions had waned. And I'd largely forgotten about all of those the heart-felt commitments. And after awhile, I came to realize that I'd equated God's presence with a place. It was as if God lived up at Hume. So when we were at Hume, we felt God's presence. But when we drove away, we were, in essence, leaving God's presence. And the only way to get back to God was to get back to Hume.

People often associate God's presence with a particular place. Some associate God with nature. We talk about "*mountain top*" experiences; majestic places where God's presence seems more apparent. Others associate God's presence with a particular time; a summer camp; a college ministry; or, a mission trip. As Christians, we long to experience God; to know God not just intellectually, but personally. But where can we experience this? Where does God's presence reside? Well according to Scripture, it's not so much a matter of "*where,*" as "*who.*" Today, God dwells where his people dwell. And that's why Jesus came to earth; to bring us – the church – into God's presence. Jesus came to make us a people who live in God's presence; and who convey his presence to the world. And if we believe that, it will fundamentally transform the way we look at each other; and, the way we live together.

We're making our way through a series entitled, "*Hero: Jesus in the Old Testament.*" Jesus taught that the whole Bible is about Him. He is the hero of God's story. He is the theme that ties the whole Bible together. So if we fail to see Jesus and his story of redemption in the Scriptures, we're not reading the Bible as God intended for it to be read. And so we're trying to read the Bible like Jesus did; as a seamless story about him. Thus far we've learned that Jesus is the seed of the woman; the descendent of Eve, who will crush Satan and defeat evil. He's the

Lamb of God who takes away our sin. He's our champion, who passes every test we fail. And he's the king we really need. Today we'll learn that Jesus is the *temple*. He is the meeting place between God and humanity.

If you have a Bible, you can turn to 1 Kings, chapter 8. Last week, we looked at David's battle with Goliath. And we saw how David is a picture of Jesus. He is the king who follows God, and seeks his glory; who fights for his people; and, who wins the battle they can't win. Like Jesus, David is a king after God's own heart.

And David's heartfelt desire was to build God a house; a place where God's presence could dwell. You might remember that when Israel left Egypt, God travelled with his people as a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. God was visibly present to his people. And he instructed them to build him a tabernacle. The tabernacle was a giant, portable tent. It was God's mobile home in the desert. As Israel traveled towards the Promised Land, God met with his people there. Israel is now in the Promised Land. David has defeated God's enemies. He has been enthroned as King. But God's presence still resides in this tent. And David is displeased with this. He wants to give God a permanent home. So he decides to build a temple, based on the blueprint of the tabernacle. But in 2 Samuel 7, God appears to David, and prohibits him from doing so. David was a man of war and bloodshed. And God says that he wants a man of peace to build the temple. And God informs David that one of his offspring – a son – will build him a house.

David eventually has a son named Solomon. And God chooses Solomon to build the temple. David commissions his son with the task. Solomon oversees the construction. The temple is built. And then, the Israelites have a huge celebration to dedicate the temple. And during this ceremony, Solomon prays a beautiful prayer. And he says this, *"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!"* ²⁸ *"Yet have regard to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to listen to the cry and to the prayer which Your servant prays before You today; ²⁹ that Your eyes may be open toward this house night and day, toward the place of which You have said, 'My name shall be there,' to listen to the prayer which Your servant shall pray toward this place."* (1 Kings 8:27-29)

As Solomon prays, he says two things about God's presence. On the one hand, God's presence is boundless. Solomon says, *"Lord, this temple can't contain you. Not even heaven can contain you."* Solomon knows that God is omnipresent. Thus no temple is large enough to house him. On the other hand, Solomon declares that God is *uniquely* present in the temple. God chooses to put his name there. In other words, God chooses to manifest his character – his perfection – in a unique way in the temple. So Solomon says, *"God, you are everywhere. And yet, you are really here."*

And Solomon's prayer highlights this deeper reality about God's presence. God is present everywhere. And yet, he's not present everywhere in the same way; at least not to us.

There are different ways you can experience someone's presence. And we all know this from experience. If I'm talking with you on social media, I get a sense of your presence, because you're communicating with me. But I don't experience your physical presence, so our connection lacks warmth and intimacy. If we're walking down the street, I sense your physical presence. But if you're playing *Pokemon Go*, I don't have your attentive presence; because you're trying to catch a Dratini. And I'm trying to prevent you from walking into the street. If you're having an argument with your spouse, you may be *very close* physically. And yet emotionally, you may be very far apart.

God is present everywhere as creator, and sustainer. But he wants to be *relationally* present to his people; like a Father is present to his children; or, like a husband is present to his wife. And the temple was the meeting place between God and humanity. It's where God revealed his *relational* presence; where Israel communed with God. That's why Solomon prays, "*God, listen to our prayers here*"; at the temple. This is *where* God listened; and where he drew near. But why would God do this? Why would he choose to dwell in a particular place? Was God stationary? Did he simply expect people to come to him, rather than reaching out to them? To answer these questions, we need to take a step back. And, we need to see how the temple fits into God's redemptive plan.

According to the Bible, God is on a mission. He wants to fill the world with his relational presence. He wants to unite his space with our space. He wants to rule this world and saturate it with his love, and holiness and peace. To accomplish this mission, God first establishes a home for himself on the earth; a particular place where he dwells. And then, he invites humanity to live with him in this place. And, then, he invites them to participate in his mission. And God does again and again. Today, we're going to trace this theme through Scripture. And we're going to look at three things; first, we'll see how humanity fails to accomplish God's mission, and is consequently exiled from God's presence. Second, we'll see how Jesus establishes God's dwelling place; how he creates a permanent relational union between God and humanity. And third, we'll see our role in expanding God's presence; how we, as the church participate in God's mission today. So we'll see look at humanity's exile from the temple, Jesus' establishment of the temple, and finally, the church's expansion of the temple.

A. Humanity's Exile from the Temple: Let's start by looking at humanity's exile from the temple. Solomon isn't the first person to build God a house. And neither is Moses. Actually, *God* is the original temple-builder. And this world is his dwelling place. Listen to these words in Psalm 78: "*And He [that's God] built His sanctuary like the heights, Like the earth which He has founded forever.*"¹ The psalmist is talking about Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. That is God's sanctuary. And he says that God fashions his sanctuary *like* the heavens and the earth. In other words, *God's design for the temple corresponds to his design for creation*. God is like an architect. And the temple is his small-scale model of this world.² And there are dozens and

dozens of parallels between God's Jerusalem temple, and God's cosmic temple. I'll just highlight a few.³

In the outer court of the temple, there was an altar, called, "*the bosom of the earth*," and a basin, called the "*sea*." The outer court is where all of Israel came to worship God. In Genesis 1, God creates the "*earth*" and the "*sea*;" and this is where all of humanity dwells. The temple was filled with carvings of trees, and flowers, and vegetation. It looked like a beautiful garden. Where does God place the first humans? In a beautiful garden. According to several passages, God "*walked*" among the people of Israel in the temple. And in the Garden of Eden, God walks with humanity. The temple is called a sanctuary, and a mountain. And the prophet Ezekiel calls *Eden* a sanctuary and a mountain. God placed priests in the Jerusalem temple. And he gave them two tasks; to "*work*" in the temple and to "*guard*" it. God places Adam in the Garden of Eden. And he gives Adam the same two tasks; to "*work*" it and to "*guard*" it. In the center of the temple, there was a room called the "*Holy of Holies*." This was like the "*hotspot*" of God's presence;⁴ it's where God would physically appear above this wooden box, called the Ark of the Covenant. On top of the Ark, there were two golden cherubim; two angels. And these angels symbolically guarded God's presence. And according to Genesis, cherubim guard the entrance to the Garden of Eden. So creation is God's a temple-building project. God is building himself a home.

And this explains why so many people feel "*connected*" to God in nature. Creation is good. God says it's *very good* (Genesis 1:31). This is God's house. And it's a *fitting* place for God to dwell. And creation reflects the beauty and majesty of its Creator. A few weeks ago, we were up in Yosemite. And there's just nothing like that drive up Highway 41; when you go through Wawona Tunnel; and you enter Yosemite Valley; it's like you've gone through this portal, and entered a new world. And all of a sudden, you're in *Narnia*, right? That view is just unbelievable. It's a profound experience. But why does Yosemite have that kind of impact on people? Because, in essence, it's just a bunch of really, really big rocks, right? And yet, it's more than that. President Obama was actually in Yosemite when we were. And he gave a speech beneath Yosemite Falls. And do you know what he didn't say? He didn't say, "*You know, we need to protect this place; because, there are a bunch of really big rocks here.*" No, he talked about the "*cathedral walls*" of Yosemite; and how they spoke to something bigger than us.⁵ And that's how people talk about Yosemite. They call it a cathedral. We can't help but use religious language when speaking about creation. And that's because it echoes the creator. As John Calvin said it's a theater of God's glory.

So God creates this world as his dwelling place. And then he fills the Garden of Eden with his relational presence. That's where Adam and Eve commune with God. But God's intention is to expand Eden. He wants to fill the entire world with his presence. And he invites humans to join him in that task. In Genesis 1, we read that, "*God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*"²⁸ *God blessed them;*

and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

God creates humans in his image. What does that mean; to be created in the *"image of God"*? It means that humans are like God, and represent him. We are giant God-mirrors; we reflect – or image – who God is. So God creates us to reflect his presence; his beauty and his holiness. Additionally, we are God's representatives. We are called to rule this world on his behalf. That's why God calls us to *"subdue"* the earth; to bring it under his rule.

So God calls humans to live in his presence, to reflect his presence, and to rule this world as his representatives. And God calls us to fill this world with more humans. Why? Because God wants to flood creation with images that reflect his presence.⁶ As more and more humans live in close relationship to God, more people will experience him. Thus, God's relational presence will dwell in more places. And the Garden of Eden will expand until it covers the whole earth. That's God's plan. And he invites us to play a critical role in it.

But here's the problem; humans keep messing it up. We fail to extend God's presence. We rebel against God. And as a result, humans are exiled from God's presence. And in Scripture, this happens over and over again.

God places Adam in his presence. And he tells Adam to, *"guard the garden."* In effect, God is saying, *"Adam, don't let anything evil enter this garden; anything that could disrupt your relationship with me."* But what does Adam do? He lets the serpent in. The serpent leads Adam and Eve astray. They rebel against God. And as a result, they're forced to leave the garden. They can no longer live in God's relational presence.

Later, God chooses Israel to be his people. And once again, he tries to establish a dwelling place among humans. God travels with Israel out of Egypt, and into the wilderness. Then, he meets with Israel in the Tabernacle. And God tells the Israelites, *"you are a kingdom of priests. Your job is to represent me to the world"* (Exodus 19:5-6). God calls Israel to reflect his presence to the surrounding nations. Then, the nations will be drawn to God. But what does Israel do? They worship false gods. They break their relationship with God. And as a result, an entire generation is prohibited from entering the Promised Land; the place where God will make his presence dwell.

Eventually, Israel enters the Promised Land. Solomon builds God a permanent dwelling place. And God fills it with his presence. Israel has another chance to participate in God's mission; to reflect God's character; to be a light that draws the nations to God. But what does Israel do? They rebel. Solomon worships false gods. And over the next 400 years, Israel descends into idolatry, division, and injustice. Occasionally a king will follow God. But for the most part, Israel's kings rebel. And the people follow suit. And eventually, the people start worshipping false gods *in the temple*. They defile God's dwelling place. And as a result, God judges his people. The Babylonians invade Israel, and destroy the temple. It's interesting; the

book of 1 Kings begins with the temple's construction. But the book of 2 Kings ends with the temple's destruction. Israel is taken into captivity. The nation is exiled from the land. But more fundamentally, they're exiled from God's presence. And that's the story of humanity.

Our sin exiles us from God's presence. So now God's presence is dangerous to us; not because God is bad, but because he's so *good*. God is like the sun.⁷ The sun is good. It gives us light and warmth. It makes life on earth possible. But we can't get too close to the sun. Similarly, God is perfect. And he's the source of our life, and every good thing. But in our sinful condition, we can't approach him. The Apostle John says that God is light, and in him there's no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). Light eradicates darkness. And we are filled with the darkness of sin. And in our dark condition, we can't enter the light of God's presence without being eradicated.

B. Jesus' Establishment of the Temple: Our sin keeps from entering God's presence. So what we need is someone to remove our sin, and permanently establish us in relationship to God. And that's what Jesus comes to do. In Jesus, God comes to us. And in Jesus, we are brought to God.

In the gospel of John, we read this, *"And the Word [that's Jesus] became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14). John calls Jesus *"the Word."* Jesus is a word from God to us; God's self-disclosure. And Jesus is God in human flesh. John says that Jesus became a human, and *"dwelt"* among us. That word, *"dwelt"* is literally, *"tabernacled."* God came to Israel in the tabernacle. And now, John says, he comes to us in Jesus. So Jesus conveys God's glorious presence to us. And Jesus *is* the ultimate temple; the ultimate meeting place between God and humanity. Think about who Jesus is. He is fully God, and fully human. And yet, he is one person. So Jesus is the union between heaven and earth; the place where God dwells with humanity.

And Jesus work flows from his identity. He comes to earth to establish us in God's presence forever. He is our representative. He lives a perfect human life, so that we can be credited with his perfection. And then he dies to remove our sin. He takes our darkness so we can live in God's light. He takes our exile, so we can come home to God. Jesus' death gives us access to God's presence. Look at what Matthew says in his account of the crucifixion: *"And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. ⁵¹ And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom"* (Matthew 27:50-51). When Jesus dies, the veil of the temple is torn. That veil covered the Holy of Holies; the place where God's presence dwelt. And that's significant for two reasons. *First*, it signifies the end of the Jerusalem temple. God will no longer dwell in the Holy of Holies. *Second*, it signifies that God's presence is now open to us. God's presence is breaking out from the Holy of Holies to bless the nations.⁸ Jesus tears the veil that separates us from God; the veil of sin. And then, Jesus rises from the dead, and ascends to heaven to live in God's presence forever.

And when we trust in Jesus, we are united to him. So what is true of him is now true of us. Jesus is the beloved Son; the perfect human who lives in God's presence. And since we are

united Christ, *we* live as God's beloved, in God's presence, *forever*. And our sin can't separate us from God, because Jesus has already removed it completely. So Jesus' establishes the temple. Remember, God promised David a son who would build him a house. That promise was partially fulfilled in Solomon. But it's ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus is the ultimate Son of David, whose builds the ultimate dwelling place; where humanity can live with God.

C. The Church's Expansion of the Temple: And that brings us to today. Where does God's presence dwell right now? According to Scripture, it dwells in *us*; in the church. Christ has made us clean. And therefore, God can dwell in us. God has filled us with his Spirit. Jesus is the ultimate temple. But since we are united to Christ, *we* too are God's temple. So now, God dwells where his people dwell. And see, that's what we didn't realize when we were up at Hume. God's presence wasn't on top of that mountain. It was among *us*; it was in our fellowship. It wasn't a matter of "*where*," but, "*who*." God dwells in and among us. And that must shape the way we look at each other; and, the way we live together.

First, it needs to change the way we look at each other. Do you want to experience God's presence? Do you want to know Christ's love and power; to experience transformation? Every Christian longs for these things. But here's the biblical reality; experiencing God's presence isn't about a destination. It's about a congregation. The good life isn't found in a particular zip code. It's found among God's people. And we simply won't experience the fullness of God's presence in isolation. Sometimes, Scripture talks about God dwelling in *me*. But far more often, it speaks of God dwelling in *us*; in the church. And Paul says that the *church* is the fullness of him who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:23). *We* are the temple. And that's why we should pursue community; because we will *never* experience the fullness of God's presence apart alone.

At Creekside, I realize that we're constantly nagging you to join a Community Group; to live life with other Christians. And full-disclosure; that's never going to change. In fact, my desire is to lovingly and gently harass you about this until Jesus returns or calls me home, ok? But I want to be clear about why I do this. It's not because I think community is some kind of placebo for all of life's hardships. Nor is it because I think you'll make life-long friends. The truth is; people are difficult. I'm difficult. Look, if you start living in community with me, you'll be disappointed. Eventually, you'll see me get frustrated with my kids, or be short with me wife. And you'll think, "*eh, he's not that great*." And that's totally true. I'm not. But God is. And we want you to experience the greatness and goodness of God. And we can't draw close to God, if we keep each other at arm's length. God has made us a *people*; a family. That means we're in this together. We grow together. We love together. And we experience God together. Practically, this might mean joining a Community Group. Or, it might mean deepening your commitment to an existing group. But in any case, it means prioritizing relationships with Christians. And listen, we do this in response to God and his story. Think about it; if this story is true; if *we* are God's dwelling place; how else could we live?

We are God's dwelling place. This needs to change the way we look at each other. Second, it needs to shape the way we live together. God's overarching goal is to expand his presence until it covers the earth. Adam and Eve did this by producing children. And we do this by producing more Christians. God told Adam and Eve, *"be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth with offspring."* God tells us, *"be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth with followers of Jesus"* (Matthew 28:19-20). God wants to extend his presence. And yes, that means we need to be concerned about reflecting God's character; about doing good, and showing mercy, and working for justice. But fundamentally, God's presence expands as more people trust in Jesus. That's *how* people come into God's presence. Peter says that we are a living temple (1 Peter 2:4-5). And the temple is growing. But how does the temple grow? Stone by stone; person by person. That's how the temple keeps getting bigger until eventually, that temple will fill the earth; because the earth will be filled with people who experience God's relational presence. So here's the crucial question; do I want to see God's presence fill this earth? Then I'll participate in his mission; and that means I'll talk to people about Jesus, so that they can know God's loving presence, and become part of God's temple. And that's our purpose not just as individualism but as a Community. The purpose of community is not to have this great experience of community, but to expand the temple. And I'd encourage you to talk about this in your Community Groups. Who are you praying for? Who are you trying to bring into the temple? Can you name that person? How are you trying to reach him or her? That's God's mission; to expand Eden to the ends of the earth. Are we in community to accomplish that mission?

If you're new to Christianity, or if you're investigating, there's only one thing I want you to walk away with today. And it's this; God wants to be close to you. God wants to be with you forever. That's his mission; to unite his space with your space. God creates this world for him, and for you. God sends Jesus to get you. Jesus takes on your humanity. Then Jesus takes your darkness, and exile, and removes every barrier between you and the presence of God. And Jesus rises as a human, to live as a human for you, forever. God has attached humanity to himself forever. And that means he will always relate to us as one of us. What more could God do to prove his desire to be close to you? If you want a relationship with God – if you want to *know* his presence – it's not so much a matter of pursuing God, as it is realizing that he has been pursuing you. It's a matter of letting him catch you. Let's pray.

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¹ Psalm 78:69.

² See http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/48/48-1/48-1-pp005-031_JETS.pdf, p. 18.

³ These parallels (and many others) are noted in G.K. Beale and Mitchell Kim, *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 2014). This book provides a thorough and accessible overview of Scripture's teaching on the temple. The outline for this talk is also adapted from material in this book. It's highly recommended! Here's the chart of the parallels made in the sermon.

Temple	Creation
Altar = "bosom of the earth" (Exodus 20:24-25; Ezekiel 43:14) Basin = "sea" (1 Kings 7:23-26)	"Earth" and "Sea" (Genesis 1:10)
Images of a garden (1 Kings 6-7)	God places humans in a garden (Genesis 2:8)
God "walks" in the tabernacle/temple (Leviticus 26:12; Deuteronomy 23:14; 2 Samuel 7:6)	God "walks" in the garden (Genesis 3:8)
A mountain and a sanctuary (Exodus 15:17; Leviticus 21:23; Jeremiah 51:51)	A mountain and a sanctuary (Ezekiel 28:13-14, 16, 18)
Priests "work" and "guard" (Numbers 18:5-6)	Adam "works" in and "guards" the garden (Genesis 2:15)
Angels guard the ark (Exodus 25:18-22)	Angels guard Eden (Genesis 3:24)

⁴ Term taken from <https://jointhebibleproject.com/product/holiness-video/>.

⁵ <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/president-obama-family-visit-yosemite-national-park/story?id=39957621>.

⁶ See <https://www.whatsbestnext.com/2011/08/what-does-it-mean-that-the-earth-will-be-filled-with-the-knowledge-of-the-glory-of-god/>.

⁷ Analogy taken from Term taken from <https://jointhebibleproject.com/product/holiness-video/>.

⁸ *God Dwells Among Us*, 93.