

VI. Sacred Spaces: Christ Our Holy Temple

July 9, 2017

Chapter 6

Purpose: To believe that God dwells in the midst of His people—yesterday, today, and forever.

Key Verses: ¹⁴**The Word became flesh and dwelt [tabernacled] among us.** We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

A. Review

Last week, I focused on the furniture of the tabernacle. Remember, there were seven different pieces of furniture located in the tabernacle complex, if you count the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat as two separate pieces. Two items were located in the outer Courtyard – the Bronze Altar and the Laver of Cleansing. There were three pieces in the Holy Place – the Table of Showbread, the Golden Lampstand, and the Altar of Incense. And finally, the Ark and Mercy Seat were located inside the Most Holy Place.

What do these pieces of furniture teach us? Well, they teach many things, but ultimately, they all point to Christ in some form or fashion. Christ is the final sacrifice that takes away “the sin of the world.” Christ cleanses us through the sacrifice of His blood and makes us fit for service. Christ says “I am the Light of the world” and “I am the Bread of Life.” Christ is the Great Intercessor, who “always lives to intercede for us.” And Christ satisfies the divine justice of the law by becoming a “sacrifice of atonement” or “mercy seat” for us. So there is much there in the tabernacle furniture that points us to Christ.

I also made the point that the furniture in each “zone” of the tabernacle teaches us something different. The altar and laver in the Courtyard teach us about justification and sanctification. They teach us about what is required to make us right before a holy and just God – atonement for sin. We can only approach a holy God after our sin problem is dealt with. That’s justification. Then, as we enter into God’s service, we need to be cleansed continually, washed by God. Being made fit for God’s service – that’s sanctification. So the furniture in the Courtyard teaches us what Christ has done for us, and what He is continually doing for us.

Next, the furniture in the Holy Place speaks about a life lived in the presence of God. The Table of Showbread speaks to us of God’s daily provision, and our need to rely on Him for all our needs. The Golden Lampstand shows us that God’s power, the power to shine the light of God’s truth in a dark and fallen world, comes to us through reliance on His Holy Spirit. The Altar of Incense speaks to us of acceptable prayer, prayer that pleases a holy God. Provision, power, and prayer – three key ingredients in living in the presence of God – *coram deo* – before the face of God.

Finally, in the Most Holy Place, the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat teach us about the awfulness of sin and the wonders of God’s grace. The Ark, containing God’s Law, teaches us about God’s righteousness and holiness. The Mercy Seat, sprinkled with the blood of an acceptable sacrifice, allows a sinner to approach the throne of God. Sin is awful and can only be atoned for through blood. But thanks be to God that He tempers His divine justice with divine

Lesson VI – Sacred Spaces: Christ Our Holy Temple

mercy. We can see God’s justice and mercy mingled together in the sacrifice on the cross of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

In our response to God’s mercy for our justification, we should grown in sanctification by relying on Him for our daily bread, living holy and blameless lives as examples to the world around us, and continually praying, even as Christ is interceding for us. Thus, the furniture of the Tabernacle teaches us about Christ and our response in obedience to Him.

B. Introduction

The theme of the lesson today is on God dwelling in the midst of His people. This is a theme that runs throughout the Bible. And we are going to trace it throughout Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation. The Scriptures are all about how God reconciles a people to Himself. We sometimes call it “redemptive history,” because the Bible tells the history of God’s redeeming work, accomplished through Jesus Christ. I call this theme the “Immanuel Principle.”

Now, I’ve taught this lesson before to the high school class when I did a mini-series on the tabernacle. The tabernacle is one example of the Immanuel Principle, but it is only one example in a long line in the Bible. So, today we will spend even some more time talking about the tabernacle. You see, even though the tabernacle in the Old Testament and later the Temple ceased to exist long ago, the principles that God was teaching Israel are still real. The principles are still in effect today. What God was teaching Israel in the tabernacle, He teaches us today through the Immanuel Principle.

Longman: In the Old Testament, God chose specific locations where He made His presence known. These areas, which we can collectively call sanctuaries, were surrounded by prohibitions since a holy God does not tolerate the presence of sin (cp. Ps. 15:1-3)... As we read the Old Testament, we cannot escape the tension between the desire to be in God’s presence and the difficulty of coming near Him. One feels the joy, but also the yearning induced by distance (cp. Ps. 84:1-2, 10)... How amazing, then, it is when we read about the coming of our Immanuel “God with us”). In the New Testament, we learn that it is Jesus who is our tabernacle/temple (pp. 64, 65).

C. Lesson

1. “Immanuel” and the “Immanuel Principle”

The name “Immanuel” only occurs three times in Scripture, and yet it is a very familiar term. The name first appears in Isaiah 7:14, and then after one other usage in the book of Isaiah (Is. 8:8), the book of Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14.

¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him **Immanuel** (Isaiah 7:14).

²⁰But after he [Joseph] had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.’

²²All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³‘The virgin

Lesson VI – Sacred Spaces: Christ Our Holy Temple

will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him **Immanuel**’ – **which means, ‘God with us’** (Matthew 1:20-23).

So, we can see from Matthew 1:23 that the name “Immanuel” literally means “God with us.” And this is the heart of the “Immanuel Principle,” that God is with us, that God is dwelling in the midst of His people. The “Immanuel Principle” is often formulated in Scripture as *“I will be your God, and you will be My people.”*

Now, immediately we can learn several things from this Principle. The first is that God is a personal God. God makes Himself known to people. God can be known, He is knowable. This is tremendous. You see, we don’t just know that there is a God, we can actually know God! God reveals Himself to us through Creation, through His Word, and through His Son.

The second point we can learn is that the Immanuel Principle is really a matter of election. God chooses us – we don’t choose Him. Why does he choose His people? Why are some chosen, while others are not chosen? Because of His sovereign, electing love. There is nothing worthy in us. We are all sinners, yet God chooses and calls a people to Himself. This is a divine mystery.

Third, there are a true people of God, a “remnant” if you will, that God chooses for Himself throughout history. God never lacks to have a people for Himself. Sometimes that remnant is small, as in the days of Noah, when it consisted only of 8 people. In the days of Elijah, that remnant numbered only 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Daniel and his three friends felt mighty alone in Babylon. When Christ was born, only a few folks, like Elizabeth and Zacharias, like Anna and Simeon, were really looking for the Messiah. But in every generation, God calls a people to Himself, to be His people. Today, if Jesus Christ has saved you from your sins, you are part of the people of God.

What we will do now is look at how this “Immanuel Principle” is repeated often throughout Scripture.

2. Original Promises of the Immanuel Principle

God first uses this Immanuel Principle language in the Abrahamic covenant of Genesis 17:7.

⁷I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, **to be your God and the God of your descendants after you** (Genesis 17:7).

God then uses this language repeatedly to Moses and the Israelites of the Exodus timeframe:

⁷**I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.** Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians (Exodus 6:7).

⁴⁴So I will consecrate the Tent of Meeting and the altar and will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests. ⁴⁵Then **I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God,**

⁴⁶They will know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God (Exodus 29:44-46).

¹¹I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. ¹²**I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people** (Leviticus 26:11-12).

Lesson VI – Sacred Spaces: Christ Our Holy Temple

¹²You are standing here in order to enter into a covenant with the LORD your God, a covenant the LORD is making with you this day and sealing with an oath, ¹³to confirm you this day as his people, that **he may be your God as he promised you** and as he swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. ¹⁴I am making this covenant, with its oath, not only with you ¹⁵who are standing here with us today in the presence of the LORD our God but also with those who are not here today (Deuteronomy 29:12-15).

So we see that God calls Abraham, and then his descendants, the Israelites, to be His people and He will be their God. He makes the promise often, and even renews it to the next generation in Deuteronomy.

3. The Immanuel Principle and the Tabernacle

In the Old Covenant, God chose the Tabernacle as a symbolic way to dwell amongst His people. It was a special visual way for the people to see that God dwelt among them.

⁸Then **have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.** ⁹Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you (Exodus 25:8-9).

²**His tent is in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion** (Psalm 76:2).

Two weeks ago I gave you my five lessons from the tabernacle, and last week we looked at the tabernacle furniture. The point of those lessons on the tabernacle was this: the tabernacle points us to Christ. Now, since Immanuel is the name Isaiah gives to Christ, and the tabernacle points us to Christ, it should not come as any surprise that the Immanuel Principle and the tabernacle are both linked to each other and to Jesus.

Remember, in addition to all the other things we have studied about the tabernacle, that the Tabernacle is *God's House*. It is arranged as a dwelling place for the Most High in the midst of His people. It has a throne room (The Holy of Holies), a living room (The Holy Place), and a kitchen (the Courtyard). God's presence, His glory-cloud, inhabits the tabernacle and this portable tent is the visual reminder of God's covenant promises to His covenant people. So, we see that another way to view the tabernacle is as a physical symbol of the Immanuel Principle – of God dwelling in the midst of His people.

4. Immanuel Principle in the New Covenant

We've already looked at how the Immanuel Principle ("I will be your God, and you will be My people") was promised to the patriarchs and embodied in the tabernacle. God used the tabernacle and later the Temple as a physical representation of his dwelling in the midst of His people. God's holy cloud, the cloud that was on Sinai, the cloud that led them in the wilderness, physically entered both the tabernacle and later the Temple to visibly demonstrate his communion with His people. But God had bigger plans in store. He begins to announce them during the end of the Kingdom era, through His servants the prophets. Even as the Kingdom establishment inevitably declines, and God judges Israel by sending them off to exile, He is preparing the way for an even more glorious manifestation of the Immanuel Principle, as He announces the New Covenant.

³¹'The time is coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,' declares the LORD. ³³'This is the

Lesson VI – Sacred Spaces: Christ Our Holy Temple

covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. **I will be their God, and they will be my people.** ³⁴No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,’ declares the LORD. ‘For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more’ (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

³⁷I will surely gather them from all the lands where I banish them in my furious anger and great wrath; I will bring them back to this place and let them live in safety. ³⁸**They will be my people, and I will be their God.** ³⁹I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them. ⁴⁰I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me. ⁴¹I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul (Jeremiah 32:37-41).

²⁴My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. ²⁵They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever. ²⁶I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. ²⁷**My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people.** ²⁸Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever (Ezekiel 37:24-28).

⁸I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; **they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God** (Zechariah 8:8).

In these new covenant promises, something remarkable happens. The people are taken away into captivity, rejected by God. Hosea even prophesies this rejection in terms of might be called the “Anti-Immanuel Principle.”

⁹Then the LORD said, ‘Call him Lo-Ammi, **for you are not my people, and I am not your God**’ (Hosea 1:9).

But the rejection will be overturned, and the people will be brought back into the land. Then the remarkable happens – the Immanuel Principle is extended to Gentiles – to the Church! The promises are still all in Old Covenant language, but they describe New Covenant realities in Christ. The law is spiritual, the promises are spiritual, the blessings are spiritual. We can see this particularly in the Ezekiel passage. Christ is described as a Davidic king or prince, one shepherd to rule over God’s people in the land forever. Notice how the sanctuary/tabernacle dwells among the people. Here we have the Immanuel Principle again.

There is a continuity of God’s promises between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church. I can’t overemphasize the importance of this point. The promises made to Israel in the OT apply to the NT church – that is, you and me – today! So when we read about the New Covenant in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and it says that God will be our God, and we will be His people, don’t just think OT Israel, think yourself!

Lesson VI – Sacred Spaces: Christ Our Holy Temple

5. Ultimate Expression of the Immanuel Principle

You see, the New Covenant promises in the Old Testament are pointing forward toward Immanuel Himself:

²⁰But after he [Joseph] had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹**She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.**’ ²²All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and **they will call him Immanuel**’ – **which means, ‘God with us’** (Matthew 1:20-23).

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. ⁶There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. ⁸He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. ⁹The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹²Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. ¹⁴**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.** We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:1-14).

Christ, obviously, is the ultimate expression of the Immanuel Principle. Truly God came and dwelt among us. In John 1:14, Christ became flesh and “tabernacled” or literally “pitched His tent” among us. We beheld His glory, just like the glory cloud filled the earthly tabernacle. But it was temporary. Christ didn’t stay among us in human form. He ascended into heaven after His work on earth was complete. But there are two important points to remember: first, He didn’t leave us behind without a Helper, and second, He’s coming again!

Longman: The Word “became flesh and tabernacled among us.” What John has done is to take the Greek word for tabernacle (*skēnē*) and make a verb out of it (*skēnoō*). While this verbal ideal is admittedly difficult to communicate in contemporary English, it presents a powerful image with deep roots in the Old Testament. Jesus is the tabernacle. Where He is, there is God. When someone met Jesus, He or she was in the presence of God (p. 65).

Longman: As the religious leaders confronted Jesus concerning His authority over the temple, they demanded a sign and He responded: “All right... Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn. 2:19). The leaders were dumbfounded; how could Jesus build a temple in three days when it took years to build it in the first place? Though He apparently did not make this public at the time, the disciples, whose later post-resurrection perspective is revealed in the gospel of John, ultimately recognized that He was talking about His body. Jesus was making a profound and subtle connection

Lesson VI – Sacred Spaces: Christ Our Holy Temple

between the temple and Himself. Although Jesus respected the temple He knew it was temporary. It was a shadow that would disappear when the light of the reality arrived (p.66).

Longman: Jesus found Himself standing before Caiaphas, the high priest, as other accused Him of saying, “I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man” (Mk. 14:58). Of course, the three days alerts us to Christ’s meaning here. He was anticipating that after three days, He would be raised from the dead. In short, Jesus identified Himself as the temple. Why is the temple no longer necessary? Because we have Jesus, who is God Himself (pp. 68-69).

Longman: When Jesus died, there was an immediate visible sign that a transformation took place. According to Matthew 27:51, at the moment of Jesus’ death, “the curtain of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.” This is surely a reference to the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. No longer is there a division between secular and sacred, profane and holy. Everywhere is imbued with the presence of God. In this way, we find ourselves nudging toward Eden (p. 69).

6. The Immanuel Principle Today

Longman: It is the contention of the author of Hebrews that Jesus fulfilled all the ceremonial law. Jesus is the ultimate priest, the ultimate sacrifice, and the ultimate festival. Indeed the teaching of Hebrews on the tabernacle/temple is situated in the discussion of Christ as priest and sacrifice. Jesus ministers as priest and brings Himself as the once-and-for-all sacrifice in “the true place of worship that was built by the Lord and not by human hands” (Heb. 8:2). This true place of worship is heaven itself.... Jesus presents His sacrifice in the real, heavenly temple. This point is further emphasized in Hebrews 9:1-10, where the author further describes the old earthly tabernacle. Its importance and significance have faded away as Jesus has entered the true Holy Place in heaven (p. 70).

Longman: The message of Hebrews, in short, relates to our study in this way: Because of Jesus’ presence, the importance of the sanctuary—altar, tabernacle, temple, has fallen away. Paul takes this truth in a new and exciting direction. Though he does not teach this directly, he certainly understands that Jesus claimed to be the fulfillment of the tabernacle/temple. To Paul, this has great implications for us as Christians, beyond the fact that Christians no longer have a temple-based religion. Indeed, it means that Christians themselves are corporately and individually temples.... In Ephesians 2:19-22, we read (pp. 70-71):

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

Longman: The picture is powerful. Christians are the stones of God’s house. The teaching of the apostles and prophets, the Scriptures, is the foundation on which this house rests. But of course the most important stone, the stone without which the

Lesson VI – Sacred Spaces: Christ Our Holy Temple

structure does not stand, is Jesus Himself. The last sentence tells us why Gentile believers, and by implication all believers, are part of the temple. Namely, God lives in us in the person of the Holy Spirit. We are filled with the Spirit at our conversion, just as the tabernacle/temple was filled with the presence of God (p. 71).

The Apostle Paul uses Immanuel Principle language when he talks about individual believers in the church.

³Don't you know that **you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?** (1 Corinthians 3:16).

¹⁶What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? **For we are the temple of the living God.** As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and **I will be their God, and they will be my people**' (2 Corinthians 6:16).

Longman: How can this be? How can Jesus and His followers both be temples? Part of the answer might be in the flexibility of the metaphor. But a large part of the answer, I believe, is found in Paul's presentation of our union with Christ. We find our identity in Christ. He stands in our place before God (p. 72).

Our bodies are Temples, and God dwells in us. In 2 Cor. 6:16, the idea of our body as a temple is linked directly with the Immanuel Principle. Christ may have ascended back into heaven, but he left the Holy Spirit behind to dwell in our hearts. We no longer need an earthly tabernacle, because each and every Christian is a living, breathing holy tent inhabited by the Spirit of God!

7. The Immanuel Principle in the Future

But that's not all. As exciting as that is, there's more.

¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ²I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, '**Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.**' ⁴He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'... ²²**I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.** ²³The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp (Revelation 21:1-4, 22-23).

Longman: Part of the imagery of heaven continues, indeed culminates the theme we have been tracing in this section. Heaven is pictured as a "New Jerusalem," so the question is immediately raised: Does it have a temple like the old Jerusalem? After all, that was really what made the city of Jerusalem so important: it was where God chose to make His special presence known on earth. Revelation 21:22 leaves us in no doubt. The New Jerusalem, that is heaven, will have no temple at all.... The reason for the lack of a temple makes it all clear. When Christ has come again and has punished all sin, there is no need for a temple. The temple represented heaven on earth; now the people of God live in the reality of heaven (p. 73).

We will live in the presence of God forever in heaven. That is the everlasting outcome of the Immanuel Principle.

Lesson VI – Sacred Spaces: Christ Our Holy Temple

Longman: The temple symbolized Eden and the original harmony that existed between God and His human subjects. Eden has been restored, and as a matter of fact something greater than Eden. Revelation 22:1-2 expresses this thought clearly (p. 73):

¹Then the angel showed me **the river of the water of life**, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its **twelve kinds of fruit**, yielding its fruit each month. **The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations** (Revelation 22:1-2).

D. Conclusion

The tabernacle is much more than an old tent in the wilderness. It is one picture in a series of pictures about how God deals with His people. He calls a people to Himself and promises to dwell among them. He calls out Abraham. He calls out Moses, then the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel fails to keep the covenant made with them, and so God extends the Immanuel Principle to all His people throughout time – the Church. Christ comes in the flesh as the ultimate expression of the Immanuel Principle, but His presence on earth at that time was temporary. So, Christ sent His Spirit to live within each one of us to be living temples, walking tabernacles. God still dwells in the midst of His people, by dwelling within His people. That's where we are today. If you are a Christian, "don't you know that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" He dwells in you in the same way that His glory cloud dwelt among ancient Israel in the tabernacle. We are all tabernacles! We are human tents that house the Spirit of the living God. But we have it much better today, because the "veil" has been torn and we have direct access to God in prayer (Heb. 4:16). We are not separated from God like the Israelites were. No, God lives within us! What a miracle! What an amazing progression from the tabernacle to now! And it gets even better in the future. At the end of time, in the new creation, we will live forever with our God. Surely He will be our God, and we will be His people.

When I look at this class, when I look at this church, I see lots of living, breathing tabernacles that proclaim witness to God's faithfulness.

E. Selected Questions for Further Reflection

1. What does it mean that you are the temple? How should you act?
2. What does it mean that the church is the temple? What implications does this metaphor have for the church today?
3. Does the picture or glimpse of heaven we get in Revelation 21-22 excite you? Again, explore the reasons for your desire or lack of it?

Next Week: Read Longman chapter 7