

Session Four: Gathered as the Temple of God

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[0 : 0 0] Hi, everybody. Welcome back to Gospel Growth. And we've been looking at what it means to be the church, specifically how the gospel gathers us together to be the church. And there's all kinds of metaphors that are used for this in the Bible. And, you know, these metaphors, they're helpful because they tell us who we are. And out of that gospel-shaped identity, we understand how we should live out that togetherness. So some of the stuff we looked at already is being the body. You know, the church is the body, and then the church as family as well.

And right now, we're going to look at another powerful metaphor, which is we're gathered as the temple of God. And to really understand this picture of the church, we have to know a little bit about what the temple was. So in Exodus 29, verses 42 to 45, it says this, it shall be a regular burnt offering throughout your generations at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet with you to speak to you there. There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory. I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar. Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate to serve me as priests. And then it says this, I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. See, the temple, when God designed it and constructed it and had Israel build it, it wasn't just this cool place where the Israelites can come together and be together and worship God. It was more than just that. The temple is the dwelling place of God. I mean, think about that. God wanted to draw near to his chosen people. He wanted to be among them, but there was a big problem. See, the problem was that his unfiltered presence in their midst would have consumed them because of their sin.

So God's presence had these barriers, which the temple was one of them. Priests were appointed who gave animal sacrifices for the people so they could come near to God's presence, but they couldn't go all the way in to God's presence. See, this was God's grace at that time to allow sinful people to draw near to his holy presence. And that was good for them, but let's be honest, that's not really ideal. There were lots of barriers between Israel, God's people, and God himself. And they could only get so close, which it's hard to have a relationship like that. It reminds me actually of a couple of friends I had in high school. Their older brother was in prison for 10 years, and in order to see him, what they had to do, they had to drive a couple of hours to get to the prison he was at. Then they had to go through metal detectors. They had to get searched by guards and checked out by prison guards, and then all that to just see their brother through a glass and to speak to him over a phone. That was it. That's how they got to experience and see their brother. But man, it was really hard for them during that time to have this real close, intimate relationship with him, right? It's not the perfect comparison, but that's sort of what the sacrificial system was like. It gave God's people access to him, yes, but it wasn't unfiltered access. There were barriers. And this is where the gospel changes everything. John 4, verses 20, it says this, our fathers, Jesus is talking to the Samaritan woman, and she's saying, well, our fathers worshiped on this mountain. But you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship. And Jesus said to her, woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. That's not where you're going to be worshiping God. And then he goes on to say in verse 23, but the hour is coming and is now here when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. See, even in Jesus's day, there was disagreement of where God's real temple was, right? Some people said, hey, it's on this mountain over here. And then other people were saying, no, no, no, it's on our mountain over here. Well, which place was the right one? Who was right, right? And Jesus answers, actually, none of it. The whole system is about to pass away because of what I am about to do, as Jesus was telling this Samaritan woman, it's no longer about worshiping at the right temple location. No, now it's going to pivot. We're going to be worshiping in spirit and in truth because on the cross, Jesus became the perfect sacrifice offered by the perfect high priest once for all. In other

words, we no longer need our access to God to be filtered or mediated for us by a priest. God's presence doesn't have to be separated from us by a temple or a curtain. We can worship God. We get to go into his presence. We have unfiltered access now because of his spirit, which is in us. Through Christ, we are God's temple. And that's the heart of the gospel. It's the beauty of the gospel. I mean, 1 Corinthians 6, verse 19 to 20, man, it just reinforces this idea. It says this, or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with the price. So glorify God in your body. It's saying this, the Holy Spirit is God's presence in us. And now, because of what Jesus has done with the Holy Spirit in us, the temple of God is not some physical place made with human hands. It's God's people. God doesn't dwell in a holy building. He dwells in a holy people. Now, many of us, we can be familiar with these passages about us being God's temple. And we can think like, hey, you know, these verses really, they're just about me. We can just interpret them individualistically and think about, you know, as God's temple, man, I need to fight sin and keep myself pure and keep sin out of it, which is true. We should. We should treat our, see our bodies as a temple of God and see that, man, this isn't a place for sin to dwell. This is a place for holiness and God's holiness. But there's another side to this beyond just a personal thing for me. It's we are the temple of God. It's not just an individualistic truth. We together as God's people are God's temple. And just think about this. Jesus, when he came, right, one of his names was Emmanuel, which means God with us, not just God with me and God with you. It's God with us. The Spirit of God is not just in you to have personal experiences with God. The Spirit is in all believers to bring the presence of God into one another's lives. Let's look at one of the primary passages on God's people as God's temple. Ephesians 2, 19 to 22, it says this, so then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household. Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord. To him, you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. We are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the

[7 : 43] Spirit. So in the community of the church, in the community of the church, we experience God's presence. Can you experience God alone by yourself? Absolutely, and you should. Man, private worship is important.

It's an imperative. We should all be doing it, but that shouldn't be valued above coming together as God's people because that is another powerful way we experience God's presence. See, I would argue this, worshiping God alone is good. Worshiping God together, coming together to do that, it is great.

Each one should also feed the other. My private worship, my time in God's presence should build this desire to be with the people of God together worshiping him. And then when we're together worshiping God, right, it also should stir this desire to be in God's presence again over and over and over again because our ability to be together to worship God, I mean, we can't do it every single day, but I can definitely worship him by myself and be in his presence more often than that.

So maybe you grew up in a family. Think about it this way. You might have grown up in a family that did Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner, right, together, like the grandparents came, the uncles and the aunts. You guys were all together. And sure, you could have like just been by yourself or with just your family and had a really good Christmas dinner, and I'm sure it would have been fun.

But man, if you remember, everyone coming together, everyone bringing their best dish, what did it make for? It made for this extravagant feast. And that's what coming together as God's temple is like. We each bring God's gift. We each bring something to the table when we gather together, and it makes for this smorgasbord of grace, this beautiful feast that we get to experience in God's presence together. And that's why it's this imperative for us to do that, because it helps us mature in Christ. And it's also for the maturing of the church as well. Look at what Ephesians 4 says in verse 15. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped. When each part is working properly, it makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. God didn't just save us as individuals. He saved a community to himself that is meant to grow together. We grow up in Christ through our personal communion with him, yes. And then through him, through that personal communion, we help the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. It builds itself up through the spiritual gifts God gives his church. And if you're a Christian, that's you. You

have gifts from the Holy Spirit that are meant for the building up of others and the building up of the church. So our encouragement to you and God's encouragement to you is don't withhold those gifts. This could just simply be a quick mindset change, even right now. Think about like, man, instead of coming to Sunday, our Sunday gatherings, or in community groups just to receive, man, realize that you're coming with something. God's equipped you with gifts. You got something beautiful to bring to the table for people to feast on. Man, come and be ready to give that and bring that. It's a cool mindset change and a very helpful one. Get involved. Get to know people. Serve. Bring those gifts. Put them to work to build up this beautiful temple of God that God has called us to be.

[11 : 20] So we are meant to be built up, but not only by direct personal communion with God. Man, God uses that, but we're meant to build one another up too. And as much as you come and you're ministering and benefiting others in the church, guess what? They're coming with their gifts and you're benefiting from that as well. Coming and being part of the temple of God doesn't mean that you're only blessing others, but at the same time, they are blessing you as well. To be built up by the body of Christ is to be, to be built up by the body of Christ is to be built up by Christ himself. God meets with us through his church. It's a beautiful thing. And it's something, because that's true, it's something we should cherish.

The temple of God is something we should cherish, and it's something we should also protect. 1 Corinthians 3, 16 to 17 says this, do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy and you are that temple. And it's saying this, that the church is precious and holy. This is a holy and precious thing. It's God's dwelling place, meant to be a place of peace and unity. The church he was talking to had done what we can so easily do many times. They had begun to make church about their preferences, what they wanted, about their favorite things. And Paul is saying that, man, that creates divisive attitudes. And those divisive attitudes are actually an attack on the unity of God's temple. And this whole thing is bigger than us, right? It belongs to God. It doesn't belong to us. You know, think about this in ancient Israel. Man, they revered God's temple. God's temple was the evidence of him being, them being his people. His temple was where his presence was. And so they revered it. They honored it. They cherished it. They respected it. They even held it in awe. And if someone was to do anything that was going to destroy that temple, man, if someone was to even just pick up a sledgehammer to go swing it at that temple, they saw it as an attack against God himself.

And so they cared about that. And they would defend it to no end, even to lay their lives down for it to protect that temple. And here, Paul has the audacity to say that that is what their division was like, this Corinthian church. Their division was like that. Their jealousy and their selfishness and their superiority complexes in the church were an assault on the dwelling place of God. And to divide the church with our pride is an attack on God himself. It's like taking a sledgehammer to his temple. And we do damage to God's holy house when we do things like gossip and slander each other and use our tongues in just unhelpful ways to tear each other down, our brothers and sisters in Christ. We shouldn't do that. But when we forget the big picture that this is God's temple and we begin to make it about our preferences and our comfort, man, we can easily start sowing seeds of division. And through that, we can bring destruction to God's temple. Instead of doing that, rather, like the Jews of old, we should cherish the temple of God. We should revere it. We should be in awe of it. We should defend it. And we should see that it's not ours and that it's so much greater than us. So as you go and you gather in your groups and you start discussing this, just some things to think about, man, think about what your relationship has been like to the temple of God.

[14 : 54] What's it been like? It's not the building, but it's the people of God that are built into God's house. Have you built them up? Have you been building up the people of God, the temple of God? Have you been built up yourself by the gifts of others in community? Or have you been destructive to the building of God and the building that God is wanting to build? Talk about how we can begin to cherish God's temple the way God does. So guys, thanks for listening, and I hope that your discussions go really well tonight.