

SESSION 6: GOD'S GLORY AND HOW THIS WORKS

Glory can mean many things, but in particular, it relates to the glorious completion and full realization of God's creation project. God glories in finishing what he starts. In Revelation 22:13 we read, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." What God begins he completes, and completing what is started is his glory!

In contrast, Man fell short of the glory of God (Ro 3:23). Man never reached completion, and as a result neither did the rest of God's 'creation project' (Ro 8:18-21). However, as we see in Revelation 21 and 22, God's creation project will be glorified and God will be glorified in its glorification.

In Genesis 1 and 2, we see that God planted the 'seed' for God, who is Spirit (Jn 4:24), to be glorified in and through Man. Man was God's 'image!' God, who is Spirit, would be revealed, in his physical universe, through the physical image of God, which was Man. So, Man was to be God's image bearer and presence carrier. In other words, God was actually to inhabit Man—to live inside of him, such was the oneness and unity that God had planned with Man—from before the world began!

Following Man's failure, Man was banished from the presence of God, or we could say from the 'garden temple' and cherubims were placed to guard it from fallen Man (Gen 3:23 and 24).

But God, as we know, never abandoned his Plan A, so one of the themes of our Bible Story is God getting this aspect of his 'creation project' back on track in preparation for his eternal world, just as he is with every other aspect of his creation project! He did this with his call of Abraham and Sarah, and the nation of Israel, to whom Genesis and all of the Old Testament is addressed.

In regards to this 'glory theme' of Man bearing the image and presence of God, this part of the project gets back on track with a 'tent.' It was known as 'the tent of meeting.' We are first introduced to this tent in Ex 33:7-10. The tent in itself was not special or sacred, but **what made it special and sacred was God's presence!** It was a tent Moses pitched to meet with God. In verse 9 we are told that "the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance of the tent, while the Lord spoke with Moses."

Later, we see that this humble tent gave way to a more elaborate tabernacle, known as Moses' Tabernacle, and we read about this in Exodus 40. Again, this tabernacle was not special or sacred in itself, but **what made it so was the presence of the Lord.**

In Exodus Ex 40:34 we read that “the glory of the LORD, in the form of a cloud, filled the Tabernacle.”

Later on in Israel's history, we find Moses' Tabernacle giving way to Solomon's Temple. The primary difference was that Moses' Tabernacle was able to move around from place to place with the Children of Israel during their wanderings in the wilderness. Solomon's Tabernacle, on the other hand, was permanent. It was made of stone! But again, it was just a building. **What made it special and sacred was the presence of the LORD.** In 2 Chronicles 7:1 we read that when Solomon finished his prayer of dedication, “the glory of the LORD filled the temple.” So, as with Moses' Tent, and then with Moses' Tabernacle, and now with Solomon's temple – God was, once again, dwelling with Man.

However, tragedy of all tragedies, Israel sinned to the point of judgement, and the nature of their sin was idolatry. So God brought in the Babylonians to judge Israel, and in the process the temple was totally destroyed , and God's presence departed from it¹. (Ez 11:22-23).

After 70 years of exile in Babylon as punishment (and you can find that in Jeremiah 29:10), the Jews began to return to their home land. The first thing they did upon returning was to rebuild the temple, and they did so under Zerubbabel's guidance. This temple became known as 'Zerubbabel's Temple.' (All this can be found in the books of Ezra, Haggai and Zachariah.)

The difference between Solomon's temple and that of Zerubbabel's was firstly, appearance. Zerubbabel's temple was so inferior to Solomon's magnificently constructed temple, that when it was being dedicated, those who were old enough to remember Solomon's temple wept! To encourage them, God sent them Haggai the prophet (Haggai 2), who prophesies that, “the glory of this present house (Zerubbabel's) will be greater than the glory of the former house (Solomon's), says the Lord Almighty.”

The second difference was that God's presence never came down and filled this temple, as it did with all the other 'temples.' But again, Haggai the prophet gave a promise, that God will indeed “fill this house with glory.” (Hg 2:7)

But centuries went by with no presence of God showing up. Around 37 BC, Herod became King of the Jews by Roman decree, and wanting to win the Jews' favor, he beautified Zerubbabel's Temple, which according to John 2:20, took 46 years to complete. By the time Herod had finished, this temple was twice the size of Solomon's temple and extremely beautiful (which the disciples alluded to in Mark 13:1), and it became known as Herod's Temple.

¹ From Believes Bible Commentary: **Ezekiel 11:22-25 I. The Removal of the Glory Cloud to the Mount of Olives (11:22-25)** At the close of the chapter, **the glory** cloud rises from the . . . city and goes to the Mount of Olives, to the east side of Jerusalem. George Williams comments: “It retired unwillingly. Its throne was the Most Holy Place, **Eze 8:4**; it then withdrew to the threshold, **Eze 9:3**; then, above the threshold, **Eze 10:4**; then it retired to the Eastern Gate, **Eze 10:19**; and, finally, to the mountain on the east side of the city, **Eze 11:23**. Thus did the God of Israel in lingering love forsake His city and temple, not to return till **Eze 43:2** (still future).”

But Jesus says something very interesting about this temple. In John 2:19 he said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." What was Jesus talking about? Well, John answers that question for us in verse 21, where he says, "But the temple he had spoken of was his body."

Now, before we go on, let's pause here for a moment to remember the promise God gave to his people through Haggai the prophet, that God would indeed one day fill this temple with his glory. We have John opening his gospel by saying that the Word, which was God, made his dwelling with us (Jn 1:1-14).

Now, interestingly, the word for 'dwelling' in the Greek, is the word for tabernacle. God, in Christ, had now come to his people as promised, but not in a temple made of bricks and mortar, but in a temple of flesh and blood—in the temple of his Son! (And remember, one of Jesus' names was 'Immanuel, meaning, God with us!)

The death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and the coming of the Holy Spirit were game-changers. Not only do we now have the long awaited return of God to his people and to Man, but he has done so in a most unexpected way. It was unexpected from the Jews' perspective and from Man's perspective, but perfectly expected from God's perspective, because this is now the growth and the blossoming of the seed planted in Genesis 1 and 2, where we saw that God, who is Spirit, was to live on earth in and through Man.

So it makes perfect sense for Paul to say to the believers in Corinth, "your body, is the temple of the Holy Spirit," (1 Cor 6:19) and then in 2 Cor 6:16 " ...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." (Quoted from Lev 26:12, Jer 32:38, Ez 37:27. This is not a new idea; this is a journey God has been on since the 'fall,' or 'from before the world began'.)

God's presence is now exactly where he has wanted it to be all along, in us, so that we can be his image bearers and presence carriers.

Furthermore, God wants his presence to be "all over the world as the waters cover the sea.' Today, this is where God's presence now is, because His people are now on every inhabitable continent on earth, and in every country of the world, and often in large numbers.

In this New Testament age, and in a very special way, God has been working—resting/ governing, advancing his creation project—his Plan A! The world has no understanding of this, and sadly neither do many of God's people. No wonder Paul prayed with such conviction and passion for the Ephesian believers, that "the eyes of their hearts would be enlightened, in order that they might know the hope to which he had called them, and the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people." (Eph 1:18)

The Bible is a Story of 'God on mission and God's on mission with his people.' We are not just spectators in this amazing Story, we are participants. According to Paul "... we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being

transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 Cor. 3:18)

Just how God is doing that is a theme we will pick up as we journey further into this most amazing Story of stories.