

God With Us

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Preacher: Jonathan de Groot

[0 : 00] I wonder if you managed to catch Apple, the watch, computer, manufacturer, Apple's latest advert, which is a Mother Nature ad.

And it was released with the launch of the Apple iPhone 15 a couple of weeks ago. And in it, Mother Nature, who is played by an Oscar-winning actress, she visits Apple HQ to perform some kind of performance review on Apple's environmental credentials.

And it is a masterclass by Apple in virtue signaling. And what happens is at the end of the advert, it's meant to be a comedy thing, the CEO of Apple, Tim Cook, he looks Mother Nature in the eye and he proudly declares Apple's environmental righteousness and all the things that they are doing. And it is really just a pagan morality tale, you could call it. But what makes it interesting is that I think it portrays how many people think of God and how God relates to us.

Where if God exists at all, then he is kind of powerful, but not fully. And God really just wants to scold us and look down on us for how we fail to meet some kind of standard.

[1 : 20] But we can also stand up to him. And God can easily be appeased by our own human moral righteousness, as if we can justify ourselves before God.

And that is how many people think of God today. And yet it is a wrong view of God. And so as we come this afternoon to the end of the book of Exodus, we see what God is really like and how God relates to his people.

Because God makes his home amongst his people in Exodus in the tabernacle. And if you were here last time we looked at the tabernacle, there was a picture we put up on the screen, which will be up on the screen again.

And you can see this is the tabernacle, a big tent. And the tabernacle essentially describes God's desire to dwell with his people, to dwell with the Israelites.

And that is really the whole point of the book of Exodus. And so we can't understand Exodus until we grasp the significance of the tabernacle. In fact, if we don't understand the tabernacle, we will struggle to grasp the purpose of our existence in this world.

[2 : 31] Because the tabernacle helps us to understand the story of our world and our place in it. And its importance is obvious just given the sheer amount of chapters devoted to it in the Bible.

There are 13 chapters at the end of Exodus that are devoted to the tabernacle. And yet God makes the point clear to Moses about what the tabernacle is for.

So Exodus chapter 25 verse 8, we read, Then let them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. God dwelling with his people.

And then again, Exodus chapter 29 verse 45 to 46. Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They 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. God wants to dwell with his people. And so the construction of the tabernacle tent is to enable that to happen.

[3 : 38] But you might be thinking, well, that was then and this is now. So how does the tabernacle really have any kind of significance for us? Well, the tabernacle essentially points to the reality of God with us.

God with us. Not in a tent, but in Jesus, who is the ultimate meeting place between God and human beings like us.

And so the reality of the tabernacle points towards the fact that God has come to live with us. Not in a tent, but in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so God with us in the tabernacle is preparation for God with us in Jesus. But like all building projects, if you've ever had one, this one comes in phases.

Phase one is the tabernacle and it is a place for God to dwell with his people. Phase two is Jesus Christ, a person to live with us as God's true tabernacle.

[4 : 43] Phase three is the church, a people that God dwells in by his spirit. And phase four is the new creation, a perfect place for God to dwell with his people forever.

And so we're going to look at this text and look at it within the wider context of the Bible.

Theologians would call it a redemptive historical approach.

We're seeing how the whole of history is helping us understand what God is doing to save us and to be with us. And so we're going to look at four points this afternoon.

They'll be up on the screen. The first point is God with us in a place, the tabernacle. Second, God with us in a person, Jesus Christ. Third, God with us in a people, the church.

And fourth, God with us in a perfect place, the new creation. So first of all, God with us in a place, the tabernacle. So God instructed Israel through Moses to make the tabernacle as this dwelling place for him.

[5 : 44] But there was a delay, as there often is with building projects. And this was because the people had broken covenant with God by worshiping a golden calf. And yet God renewed his covenant with them.

And so this great project was back on task. And yet the tabernacle tells us that it is no simple thing for the holy God to come and dwell with sinful people.

And so in Exodus chapters 35 to 40, we see how the tabernacle was completed exactly according to God's plan. And so throughout these chapters, there are certain statements that are repeated. And we heard those in chapter 40. So this phrase, as the Lord commanded Moses, comes up again and again. I think it comes up 12 times. And then another phrase, as the Lord commanded him, comes up again and again, I think seven times.

And so we're being told how now Moses and the people are doing exactly what God told them to do. And so this is obedience to God, as opposed to, with the golden calf, disobedience to God.

[6 : 59] And so after all these instructions, in Exodus chapter 25 to 31, and then all the preparation, Exodus chapter 35 and 36, and then all the construction, Exodus chapter 36 into chapter 39, we get to chapter 40, and then the tabernacle at long last is set up.

And so chapter 40, verse 33, we read, then Moses set up the courtyard around the tabernacle and altar and put up the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard.

And so Moses finished the work. That's a significant statement because it's saying, now it was possible for God to dwell with his people.

And so the tabernacle functioned as this visible dwelling place for God on earth. It was like heaven coming down to earth. Just read chapter 34, verse 40.

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. The cloud symbolizes the powerful presence of God, just like the cloud that had previously descended on Mount Sinai in Exodus chapter 24.

[8 : 16] So God came down in this cloud of glory as soon as the tabernacle was complete. It's as if God could not wait to be with his people.

They were there. He wanted to come down and be with them. And yet, still, the glory of the Lord was so intense that Moses couldn't go in.

So we read verse 35. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And so from now on, what we're being told here is that God's presence was with his people.

Verse 36. In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out. But if the clouds did not lift, they did not set out until the day it lifted.

So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day and fire was in the cloud by night in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels.

[9 : 23] And so Exodus has been moving forward towards this very moment. And God's glory was so spectacular that the people were in absolutely no doubt that God was with them.

And God would stay with them all the way to the promised land. Because God didn't just want to save his people from their slavery in Egypt. God wanted to be with his people, to dwell with them and amongst them.

God wants a relationship with the people he has made. And that is good news. And that's why this is such a significant phrase in the storyline of the Bible. As it moves towards the full restoration of

God and his relationship with his people that happens in Jesus.

And so just think back to the beginning at the creation and Adam and Eve, the first human beings, remember they were in a perfect relationship with God.

We're in the Garden of Eden, which in fact was the first sanctuary, a garden temple, if you like. God dwelt perfectly with his people.

[10:36] And yet the intimacy of that relationship between God and his people was soon lost because of Adam and Eve's sin. And so remember they were banished from the garden and humanity has been separated from God ever since.

And so it's against this devastating backdrop that the tabernacle comes as a phase in God's plan to restore this broken relationship he has with humanity.

And so as we continue to follow the Bible storyline, we move from the tabernacle and we move then on to the temple and that becomes the dwelling place of God with his people.

But then neither the tabernacle or the temple could give the solution to humanity's separation from God because of our sin. The solution was coming in Jesus.

And so can you see how at the end of Exodus, we've got God with us in the place, the tabernacle. Secondly, then the next phase of this great building project of God, which encompasses all of history, is God with us in a person, Jesus Christ.

[11:47] And so the tabernacle was built and it was furnished in a certain way. And everything about the tabernacle basically said sinful people cannot get anywhere near the holy God.

It is impossible. And yet God's desire is to be with his people. And so the tabernacle had a courtyard, they had a bronze basin where priests would wash before entering the tent.

There was a bronze altar where they would make their sacrifices. And inside the tabernacle was separated into two sections, separated by a big curtain. So the larger room was called the holy place.

The smaller room was called the most holy place. And the most holy place was this 15 foot square cube. And the most holy place had just one item inside it.

And that was the Ark of the Covenant. And we read about that in chapter 37. And inside the Ark were the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments.

[12:54] And then the lid of the Ark was called the mercy seat or the atonement cover. And there was this elaborate sacrificial system to deal with the sin of the people.

And basically it was all saying that God cannot dwell amongst people without sacrifice for their sins being made.

And so it's all pointing to Jesus as the perfect sacrifice for our sin. And that is what makes it possible for God to dwell with people.

And so the story of the Exodus concluding as it does with a tabernacle is pointing us to Jesus as our true tabernacle. Because the fullness of God's presence came to earth in a human being in the person of Jesus Christ.

And that's why John begins his gospel by announcing in John chapter 1 verse 14 the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

[13:58] We have seen his glory the glory of the one and only son who came from the Father full of grace and truth. In the original the word dwelling means to pitch a tent or to tabernacle.

And so we're being told in the New Testament that Jesus fulfills the purpose of the tabernacle as the dwelling place of God. Paul says in Colossians for God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.

And so God's glory came from heaven to earth in a person in Jesus Christ. And that's why Jesus is the true and better tabernacle.

And Jesus is also the true and better temple. Because when Jesus said destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days Jesus was referring to his own body as he was about to die on the cross and then be resurrected.

And what he was saying was that he would open up the way for human beings to get back to God. because we are separated from God because of our sin.

[15:12] And that's why this curtain in the temple was saying you cannot get near God. It was like a massive no entry sign that stopped anyone getting into God's presence.

And yet when Jesus died on the cross remember what happened to the curtain in the temple it was torn in two from top to bottom. Because God was saying visibly that through the death of Jesus he

has opened up a way into his presence.

And so the writer to the Hebrews says in chapter 10 we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain that is his body.

And since we have a great priest over the house of God let us draw near to God. It is only possible to draw near to God to know God to be in relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. And it's only his sacrifice on the cross for our sins that makes this possible because we can be forgiven and then enjoy this restored relationship with God.

[16:30] Because God can't just ignore our sin as if it didn't matter. In his justice he's got to punish it. But through the death of Jesus on the cross God can punish our sin without punishing us.

Because his son Jesus was punished in our place. And that is why the Bible is this fantastic news, this fantastic message of how God in his great love for us restores this broken relationship that we have with him.

And it happens through the death of Jesus. So firstly we've got God with us in a place in the tabernacle. Secondly God with us in a person Jesus Christ.

And then thirdly God with us in a people and that's the church. So at the end of Exodus the Israelites knew God's presence was with them because they could see this cloud over the tabernacle.

And so while they lived in tents God would pitch his tent among theirs. And when they were on the move God would move with them so they knew that God was there.

[17:43] God was with his people in a place the tabernacle and then he was with them in a place the temple and then God came to earth as a person he was with his people in a person in Jesus Christ.

That's why he's called Emmanuel God with us. And so how is God present with his people today? Well the next phase of God's great building project is the church because God's presence is with his people through the indwelling of his spirit.

Listen to what Jesus said to his disciples shortly before he died. In John chapter 14 he said and I will ask the father and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever.

The spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him because it neither sees him nor knows him but you know him for he lives with you and will be in you.

Jesus is saying that the Holy Spirit will be in his disciples. And so it is the Holy Spirit that marks us out as God's people in this world.

[18:56] Paul says in Ephesians chapter 1 when you believed you were marked in him with a seal the promised Holy Spirit who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession.

And so when Paul speaks of the church he says in 1 Corinthians don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and God's Spirit lives among you.

And so believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are now a holy temple. God by his Spirit lives in us.

And so Jesus is described as the cornerstone and believers are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

And so Christians live every day in the presence of God because we are filled with the Spirit of God. Which of course has enormous practical implications for your life as a Christian believer but also for our churches and for our church.

[20:12] God lives by his Spirit then it impacts what we think about with our minds and what we look at with our eyes and what we say with our lips and what we do with our bodies and how we choose to spend our time.

Because if God is with us by his Spirit we want to do what God wants us to do and we want to avoid what God knows is bad for us.

And we'll live our lives with this constant awareness that God is with us wherever we go in trials and in tribulations and in suffering.

And so this is a great challenge for us God dwelling in us but it is also a great encouragement. So it applies to us as individuals but it also applies to us as a church because the apostle Peter says that we're like living stones being built into a spiritual house.

So we are a community of people who are to live as people who belong to God in such a way that we showcase the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ to this world.

[21 : 35] And so the church should be the only place in the world where people together experience the presence of God as we worship him. And where people see what it means to know God.

So they should look at our lives as the church and say okay there is something very different about that person. What is it that makes them different? What is it that makes them a good person to be around?

different. And it's because God dwells in his people. There's got to be something distinctively different about the church. Different because God is with us.

life. And so as we love God and as we love one another and as we love the world and all we do we should be giving a credible witness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because God with his people by his spirit should be a beautiful sight to behold. And it should be a transformative community to be a part of.

[22 : 43] Because God is in the business of changing lives isn't he? And so just as God's presence filled the tabernacle in Exodus so we as God's people today who are scattered throughout the world are to fill the earth with his presence.

So everywhere we go we take the presence of God with us out into the world. Greg Biela New Testament theologian in a great book called *The Temple and the Church's Mission* says this our task as the covenant community the church is to be God's temple so filled with his glorious presence that we expand and fill the earth with that presence until God finally accomplishes the goal completely at the end of time.

That's a great paragraph that describes the mission of the church filling the earth with God's presence. Because God dwells in his people. And that's the third point.

God with us in a place, the tabernacle, God with us in a person, Jesus Christ, God with us in a people, the church, and then finally God with us in a perfect place and that is the new creation.

And so the climax of the Exodus story with the tabernacle looks towards Jesus but it also points beyond Jesus to what Jesus has achieved for us.

[24 : 15] Because in the future God will dwell with his people forever and ever and ever in his new creation. And it will be a perfect place.

It will be paradise because everything will be renewed. And so the paradise lost at the fall in Genesis chapter 3 will be restored in the new creation at the end of Revelation.

And so remember how there was no need for a place for God to dwell in the Garden of Eden. God was just there with humanity, with Adam and Eve.

And that's why the Garden of Eden was the first sanctuary, the original sanctuary, the Garden Temple, because Adam and Eve walked and talked with God. Because they were in a perfect relationship with him that wasn't spoiled by sin.

And so all of this is saying to us that the goal of creation, God dwelling with his people, becomes the goal of redemption, that God wants to dwell with his people, God with us.

[25 : 28] So God created the world to be with us, God redeems the world to be with the people he has made. And so from the very beginning of the Bible right through to the very end of the Bible, we've got this series of events, of phases, in God's great building project where he redeems his people from their sin through Jesus Christ so that he might dwell with them, so that his very presence might be with the people he has made.

God with us. Because one day God again will be at the very center of everything and God's people will worship him forever.

And so the tabernacle and the temple, representing a bit of heaven on earth, look forward to this great merging of heaven and earth in God's new creation.

And it's summed up in John's vision in Revelation at the end of the Bible. In Revelation chapter 21 verse 1 to 3 we read these great words. Then 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.

I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, look, God's dwelling place is now among the people and he will dwell with them, they will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.

[27 : 15] That is the ultimate dwelling place of God, God among his people where there is no need for tabernacles, no need for temples because God is there.

And that's why we read again at the end of Revelation, I did not see a temple in the city because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

Again, it is the ultimate God with us, filling everything with his glorious presence. And so in this city, God's people, we're told in Revelation, will see his face.

And so to drill the message home that God wants to dwell with humanity, the city described in Revelation is described as a perfect golden cube.

The city was laid out like a square as long as it was wide. Where else in the Bible do you read about a golden, perfect cube?

[28 : 19] the most holy place in the tabernacle. That's where the glory of the Lord filled the place.

And so the new creation will be fully filled because God will dwell among his people and we will live in the glorious presence of God forever.

That is what's coming. God's people will be at home with him. I really love war movies and one of my favourites is Christopher Nolan's film Dunkirk and it's about Operation Dynamo.

That's when the Allied soldiers were evacuated from the beaches of Dunkirk by the British civilians as they decided to sail across the English Channel in their small boats to rescue the soldiers on the beaches.

And so the British army had been surrounded by the German troops and they were stranded at Dunkirk. But the soldiers were rescued in what Prime Minister Winston Churchill hailed as a miracle of deliverance.

[29 : 27] And so in the movie, if you've seen it, there's a really powerful image seen. And it comes near the end and it involves Kenneth Branagh who is a great actor. And his tears are, his eyes are welling up with tears.

And he's the Royal Navy commander and his task is to oversee the evacuation of all the British troops from the beach. But it is an impossible task.

And so the music builds up and it reaches this climax and Branagh's eyes well up with tears. And so did mine when I last watched it. Because he sees something coming in the distance and the soldier next to him says, what is it?

And hands him the binoculars. And so Branagh looks through these binoculars and the soldier says, what do you see? And he replies, home. And then the music changes and then the angle switches and we see the arrival of all of these hundreds of British civilian boats.

Medium sized boats, small boats with normal people who have come to rescue these trapped soldiers. And it's such a powerful scene because when all seemed lost, there were in reality 300,000 otherwise doomed troops who were rescued and taken home.

[30 : 49] And I think it's a great illustration of God's goal in creation and in redemption. Because God wants to dwell with humanity and the gospel of Jesus Christ tells us that home has come for us.

We're separated from God because of our sin, but Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. And that is you and me. And so God wants to be with us, with you.

And that is why the message of Exodus is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. We are enslaved to sin and have been exiled from God's presence and yet through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is our mediator, who is our Passover lamb, who is our high priest, who is our sacrifice, who is our tabernacle, all Exodus language.

Through Jesus, God delivers us from our sin and the punishment we deserve. Home has come to us. And now when we put our faith in Jesus, God is with us by his spirit in our lives.

And he leads us through this earthly wilderness as we make our way towards the promised land. And so as his people, now we can enter his presence for worship.

[32 : 11] But one day when Jesus Christ returns, he will take us into God's glorious presence where we will be with him forever. And so are you part of this great salvation project that has been designed and constructed by God?

Because the only way you can be part of it is if you have accepted that invitation from God in Jesus Christ to go back to him. Because we will either dwell with God forever in his presence or we will be separated from God forever in hell.

And so if we don't want to know God and love God and experience God's presence in this life, then we can hardly expect to dwell with him forever in the new creation.

But God's desire, Exodus tells us, the Bible tells us, God's desire is that he will dwell with the people he has made. And so enjoy his presence now as one of his people through Jesus and by the spirit as you look forward to God dwelling with you forever.

Because that is why we were created. He will be God's ultimate.

[33 : 40] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. For Buyers a raise. Nowadays, amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.