

The Temple of God

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[0:00] It's when I hear about those kinds of things, I'm just like that's it. That's why we're here. That's why we come to church, where we can get to a place where we can encounter God's presence! And love ourselves.

That's it. Not to listen to a concert and sing along to some karaoke, not to then listen to a TED talk, but to genuinely encounter Christ. Now, is that easy?

No, it's not. It's actually very hard. And maybe something that's on my heart the most is, she just said, it's the only thing that's real. So if it's the only thing that's real, can we be as real as we can as we pursue him? Recognizing that we are filled with doubts, we are filled with anxiety and distractions, but can we be as real as we can as we approach this real and holy garden?

That's what we've been doing. And honestly, I hope that that's what you sense from us as we try and figure it out. Please do continue to fill out the senses. We're trying to figure out how to get alongside one another, to consider how to stir each other up in love and good works.

But I'll give you a confession right here. This is our first time in figuring out how to put people together. Okay? We've not done this before. I've not got tons of experience in it, but we give thanks to God that he's brought us together.

[1:12] And so just join us in prayer as we go, well, actually, what is it that actually the Lord has in store for us here? That's something that I would deeply, deeply cherish your prayers for, because that is what church is. You guys all came to church today.

Okay, you woke up, you got ready, some of you better than others, and then you came to church. But really, what is church? We talk about what church is, and we've been going through this series going, okay, what is really church?

Making us think about what is church. And of course, if you've been around Christianity for long enough, you'll know, well, church is not a building. It's a people. It's us gathering together to worship him. That's church. We don't go to church.

We are the church, is maybe what we've heard before. But today, we're actually going to focus on something, which is about the space that we create, the temple of God itself. If you asked me to describe what a temple of God is, it would be us creating a place and a time where the people of God come and encounter the presence of God.

It's us creating a place and time where the people of God can come and encounter and meet and walk with the presence of God. That's what church is. Of course, growing up, we've also got these concepts of nice church buildings, right?

[2:21] Can anyone think of any nice buildings? Who are the well-traveled people here who have gone around and seen? Actually, even in Hong Kong, there are some nice buildings. Queenie, what comes to mind when I ask you to think of, what's a nice church building that you've been to?

King's College Chapel. Beautiful, where it just draws you into the presence of God. Where else? What other ones? Who else is well-traveled? Joe, where have you gone to when you've seen a building and you're like, wow, that is God?

Or that makes you think about God? St. John's Cathedral. St. John's Cathedral. I know that many people get married there as well. That's a beautiful, beautiful place. Those of us who come from England, we lived in a place called Litchfield.

Have you guys been to Litchfield Cathedral? Super nice. Terrence, super nice. Every time we walk in, you're just like, oh. And there's a little statue there. Actually, there's a sculptor who created a lot of different statues in that cathedral.

And he'd make these perfect, beautiful sculptures. And then just at the end of it, he would put a little mark on them just to almost get out of his way and say nothing is perfect other than God. And it's

just stuck in my head that actually we can create something so beautiful, but it still doesn't compare to the beauty of God.

[3:28] Christine and I, we got married on a cruise ship. And we took 70 Chinese people onto a cruise ship in the Mediterranean. And the first stop that we went to was Rome. And you go to Rome and you go to St. Peter's Basilica.

You go to the Sistine Chapel. You walk in and you look up. You just can't help it. It's just a default response when you walk into a building like that and you look up. The whole point is to actually create this space where we look up.

During COVID, of course, church was shut down or we did all these different kind of creative things. And those who maybe were on the fringe anyway, maybe fell off even further and just resorted to online. And I remember when there'll be moments where it opened back up for a few weeks and then cases would go up and close again.

I remember one moment talking to a friend. He kind of half goes to a church here in the city. And he said, James, I didn't realize. When I walked back into church, I realized that everything was intentionally curated for me to worship, whether it's the lighting, whether it's the volume of the music, whether it's the kind of music, the temperature.

Everything was just curated for me to be able to worship. And I remember, honestly, in my head, I was like, that is so consumeristic. That is the most consumeristic thing we can say.

[4:41] And on one hand, that is true. But on the other hand, I also just, I'm starting to appreciate and admire the people, the churches that are intentionally putting things in place so that the people of God can encounter the presence of God.

Where we can remove all the distractions, where we can go into this place where we can actually worship God fully, truly, wholly. The problem is, sometimes we end up relying on that.

And if you've noticed of being here and you've, actually, we have a little bit more space, I feel, these days here. But this isn't the most comfortable place. The ceilings could be a lot higher if I had my way.

We could maybe have stained glass windows there. But yeah, why did you come to church? What was the point of it? Today, we're going to look at what the temple of God truly is. Because scripture says the temple of God is no longer a building, but it is the people.

It's actually the people who are sat here. You guys are the living stones of this new temple. What does that mean? Do you know what that means? As I've been looking at it and praying over it this week, I'm like, wow, there's some really interesting stuff here.

[5:46] So I'm going to invite us to stand for the word of God. I'm going to invite one of the birthday boys to come back up to read to us, Trevor. He's going to read to us the word of God. And if you're here for the first time and you're like, why do we keep standing and sitting?

Especially for this bit, when it comes to the word of God, we're trying to remind ourselves constantly that we should be filled with reverence and awe. That the word of God truly is powerful living.

And so I'm going to invite Trevor, who, as you were reading the mission statement, she just had this beautiful radio kind of voice. That I thought maybe we'll have you read again for us. First Peter, chapter two.

This is the word of the Lord. So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk that by it you may grow up into salvation.

If indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious. You yourselves, like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

[6:56] For it stands in scripture. Behold, I am laying in Zion, a cornerstone chosen and precious. And whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.

So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.

They stumble because they disobey the word as they were destined to. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. This is the word of the Lord.

[8:04] Please take a seat. Thank you, Trevor. So my goal today is you can leave here having a refreshed idea of what the temple of God actually is.

And if you really are the living stones that Peter talks about, that you will live in a manner worthy of that kind of calling. So that is what we're going to do. But before we land in 1 Peter 2, I must take you on a journey and it goes all the way back to Genesis.

We're going to go from Genesis all the way actually to Revelation. And we're going to be talking about the garden first. If you think about the garden, that was the original temple. It was the original temple because that's where God walked with man.

Okay. So that's when Adam and Eve got to actually be in God's presence. And it was actually God's design that he would have this space, this garden for Adam and Eve to live in, to work and to keep. Now, just bear in mind there, a lot of the scholars and theologians will acknowledge that actually it was the garden that was supposed to be worked and kept. But then actually outside of that would be uncultivated land. The goal, the goal of creation was to then for the garden to spread out, to continue to bear God's image.

[9:09] And they would be in that presence. Does anyone know what the word Eden actually means? I'm looking at those whose children are actually called Eden. Joe, do you know, do you remember what it means?

Don't worry, I don't remember my kids. Delight. Well done. Oh, I put him on the spot there. You got it. Okay. It means delight. Delight. And if you've met Eden, you will see delight. You're right. Delight. It means God created this place where we would be with him and we would be filled with delight.

I've been memorizing Psalm 16 this week. He says, in your presence, there is what?

Fullness of joy. Why is that delight? Because this garden is filled with plentiful of a paradise. That's why it's there. Now, there comes a moment though.

We had the plenty. We had the paradise. And then we decided, oh, we actually also have the tree of life where the river flows in and actually they will just be flourishing forevermore. Yeah, we decided, okay, we like that, but we would rather be in charge ourselves.

[10:07] We would rather be the ones that discern what is right and wrong. And so instead of relying on the tree of life and the garden that was plentiful and paradise, we decided, hey, we're going to choose our own way. We're going to choose that tree instead.

And that's the moment when we decided to choose our own way, we were exiled from the garden of Eden. We were exiled from that very first temple. And then of course we were pushed out, the cherubim, then God.

And from that moment, we've been out there. And honestly, ever since that moment, we've been trying to get back into the garden. That's been the heart's cry. So what happens if you fast forward a little bit from Genesis, then you move into the time where the Israelites are now wandering still in exile, in the wilderness, looking around and God says, I still want to dwell with you.

I still want to be with you. But you chose, you know, whenever we say we feel far from God, the next question is, well, who moved? And of course the answer is we moved. We chose our own way. We turned our backs on him. And now we're wondering, how do we get back into there? And God's been saying, well, I want to be with you. So during the Israelites' times in the wilderness, he would create, there was the tabernacle.

[11:11] He gave them the instructions to make the tent. And interestingly, that tabernacle itself was a mirror of the garden of Eden. It would be the menorah, which is the lampstand, which would signify the tree.

It would have the kurta, which represents the cherubim that were now blocking us from the garden of Eden. And of course you could not enter in, no one can enter into the tabernacle apart from one person one day a year on the day of atonement, Yom Kippur.

Why? Because humans, we chose our own way. So we are sinful. And because of that, the moment we enter into the presence of something that's holy, we would disintegrate.

We would die. And so God says only one person, and it will be through a whole ton of different sacrifices. That person has to be completely prepared, given all the sacrifices necessary for him to enter into my presence for one day a year.

That was the tabernacle. And these features, whether it's the ark or the table or the curtains or the holy of holies, all of these would just be basically a portable, temporary, mobile precursor to what was going to happen.

[12 : 17] It was a portal to the presence of God. We've been trying to get back to that moment where we can be filled with delight, where we can be in his presence again. We couldn't because of sin.

So that tabernacle eventually, when they move into Jerusalem, becomes a temple. So they built this glorious temple. David designed it. Solomon built it. And it was glorious. And again, it would mirror the Garden of Eden.

All of this is about being in the presence of God. The word tabernacle itself simply means to be dwelling with God. And this temple was enormous.

And it was great. And it was actually built on Mount Moriah, which is, if you go all the way back to Genesis chapter 22, was exactly the mountain where Abraham chose to go and worship. And how did he worship? The very first mention of the word worship was when Abraham in Genesis 22 turns to his servants and says, you wait here.

My son and I are going to go to the mountain to worship. What did he mean by worship? Wasn't synth pads on, electric guitar, let's sing a nice song.

[13 : 18] It was, I'm going to sacrifice my son because God is not only my number one, he is my only one. And it's on that mountain that Solomon's temple was built. And from there, people would go and dwell in there.

But of course, it doesn't last. It gets destroyed by the Babylonians. King Nebuchadnezzar destroys it. Later, it is then built again, but a smaller version by Zerubbabel. And then that's the temple that we actually see where Jesus actually goes and steps into.

And so you see, since the beginning, God's been trying to find a way. We've been craving for a way to be back in his presence. That is essentially why the temple even exists.

We're craving for the presence of God, which is the Shekinah, which is this manifest indwelling of God's presence. We want it. We know it. We need it. We can't find it in anywhere in the world. And yet somehow it always still keeps running away.

Why? Because we keep running away. Because we keep choosing our own way. And so these sacrifices in these temples need to continue. And a couple of weeks ago, when we were in Hebrews 10, we were talking about that Christ's sacrifice was once and for all.

[14 : 23] Actually, the Levites had to stay standing during all their services. Because why? Every year we would make mistakes. Every year we would need sacrifices. So they would always be standing, always be working.

Until the moment came when Jesus decided, well, that's not going to work anymore. What we're going to do now is I'm going to make the ultimate sacrifice for you. And what does he do? He does it. And then he sits down. He drops the mic and he says, it is done.

It is finished. From this moment, the curtain is torn. Now you all have access to my presence. A lot of times we think about Christianity, we think about all the rules that we need to kind of abide to, the things that we can do, things we cannot do.

Jesus says, actually, all those laws were put in place. Those rules were there for relationship.

Those rules were there so that we would be presented to God in a way where we won't die.

You look at Exodus 33, when Moses encounters God, it's kind of like, well, God's like, hey, you actually can't be in my presence because if I let you see me, you would just die. You look at Isaiah, you look at Ezekiel, everyone's like, get away from me, God.

[15 : 26] Even Peter, when he meets Jesus, he's like, depart from me, a sinner. When you are just faced with something that is so pure, so bright, for those of us who are blemished, we can't help but hide in shame.

The temple, the tabernacle is the place where we can prepare ourselves to be back with God again. And that's where we go from Genesis all the way now to the New Testament where Jesus is like, it's not going to work.

Time and time again, these people keep turning away. So in John 1, what do we see? The word became flesh and dwelt among us. The word dwelt means tabernacle.

The word tabernacled among us. So Jesus decided to say, well, this is the moment. Actually, if you have your Bibles, and I think our lovely team, welcome team, have handed out some Bibles.

If you can even flick with me to John, the book of John, chapter 1 and 2. You'll see this. So chapter 1, verse 14.

[16:29] And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory. Glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. Thank you, Caleb. Verse 16.

For from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses. That's the law that would keep us clean so we could even be in God's presence. But now grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

No one has ever seen God, the only God who is at the Father's side. He has made him known. Because we kept failing in entering into the presence of God, the presence of God decided to come to us.

This was the one thing that Jesus cared so much about. Think of the time when Jesus got angry. When did he get angry? JP, when did Jesus get angry?

When he entered into the temple, and people had defiled the temple, and turned it into a den of thieves, right? And actually, that's only in chapter 2. So if you've got your Bibles, you can just look it over.

[17:35] In chapter 2, verse 13 to 22, this is where he walks into the temple. Can you just, now that I've told you a little bit about the Garden of Eden, about the tabernacle, can you imagine just Jesus walking into the temple?

He's like, guys, for hundreds of thousands of years, this is the place where you can actually access God. And what are you doing? You're trying to make some money. You're trying to take advantage of the people who have journeyed from afar to give sacrifices, and you're trying to sell them these things to make a bit of profit.

This is the, why is he so angry? Because this is, not because he's worried about them ruining the temple, or the carpet, or whatever it is. He's saying, this is the place where you can actually access God himself.

Delight. And yet you have chosen to use it for something else. Can you see why he was so angry? Because this was the tabernacle. This was the temple.

So he comes out, and he says something outrageous. He says, chapter 2, verse 19, Jesus answered them, destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews then said, it has taken 46 years to build this temple, and you will raise it up in three days.

[18:38] Brackets sarcasm. But he was speaking about the temple of his body. 46 years. Herod was actually undergoing a huge renovation project, so this temple, not quite as big as Solomon's, would be built up so that the people can worship God themselves.

One of our favorite cities to travel to is Barcelona. We went when we, the year that we got married, and who's seen the Sagrada Familia? Still not complete.

I think 143 years and counting is continuing. It just gives me this beautiful image that actually we, as the body of Christ, we as the church, are still undergoing construction.

We're not complete yet, but one day we will be. Hopefully, just like the one in Barcelona. And so Jesus says, you can tear this down now. It doesn't matter. In three days, I will build this up.

What is he saying? He's turning it now. He's saying, okay, the tent didn't really work. The building, the temple didn't really work. I'm going to have to be that temple. And so this would have been just outrageous for the people.

[19:40] They wouldn't have been able to understand what he was talking about here. But what he was saying is, now flick with me to Romans chapter 8. Please do come with me. And if you're not super confident in just scripture and where it is, even just following along here is good to help you find or just keep one finger on the contents page.

Romans chapter 8. If you want to find out more about what it means for us to be at the temple of God, not only is 1 Peter 2 powerful, but this is why. Okay, so it's chapter 8, verse 1.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. Here's the key line. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do.

So he put the law in place. We try to follow the law so we can be in God's presence, yet time and time again, we keep failing. And so he says this. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, by us, by our depravity, could not do.

By sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.

[20:52] Jesus says actually in his sermon on the mount, he says, I'm not here to abolish the law. I'm here to fulfill it on your behalf. You couldn't do it yourself, but here I am doing it for you. And now my spirit is gonna live inside you, which means what God sees in me, he will now see in you.

Why? Because I live inside you. That's what he's saying here. So you can see here that the law did not satisfy what we needed to do. But if you carry on going down to the rest of chapter eight, it's talking about now the spirit of Christ lives in you.

So chapter eight, verse 10, but if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness. Because his spirit dwells in us now.

His spirit has tabernacled in us and those who follow the spirit of God are the sons of God. So now suddenly we have access to God. We can call him Abba Father.

How, when, what was that moment when the spirit came upon us? Aidan, what was that moment when the spirit descended? Pentecost, Acts chapter two. When Jesus in Acts chapter one, okay, okay, before that, he dies, he rises again, and then he goes to Acts chapter one, and then he leads him to the mountain, and then he flies up into the sky, and then he says, I'll be back.

[22:01] But before that, I will send my Holy Spirit onto you, and you will be my witnesses to the rest of the world. And then what happens? And then they go to Jerusalem. They go to a room. They pray for 10 days, waiting for God, because they were so hungry.

They were like, we can't unsee what we just saw. Something has to change. Our lives have to radically change. And so they go and pray for 10 days, and suddenly that's when the moment the Holy Spirit falls on them.

And now we are the temple. You sat here right now. If you acknowledge that Jesus is your Lord, it means the Holy Spirit is inside you, which means you are the church.

You are the temple. That temple that only one person, one day a year, after doing tons of sacrifices, can enter into, you now embody that here.

If you've been in church for a long time, you may have heard that before, and so you've just let that fly over your head, and you're like, okay. But if you understood what that really was, that the mighty power of God, the whole fullness of God, now dwells inside you, and me, it should blow your mind.

[23:13] It should change your life. Of course, going back to 1 Peter 2 now, and I promise we won't fly around too much more after this. It says, as you come to him, chapter 2, verse 4, as you come to him, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God, chosen and precious, you yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God, through Jesus Christ.

So not only are you a temple, you are not really the full temple of God by yourself. You cannot sit home and be the complete temple of God. You have to come and be with the other living stones, us.

The moment you step into this room, the moment the people of God come into a place to encounter the presence of God, we are the church. We are his temple.

You see, the access that each of us have is personal, but the address here is plural. He's talking to us as a whole group. Look to the person next to you, or just look across the room now, and just think to yourself, wow, wow, together, we are the church.

Together, we are the body of Christ. Together, we are the temple of God. In 1 Corinthians 3, it says this, that actually, we are now God's temple.

[24:37] And of course, we look at that, and go, what is that about us? Sorry, okay, you don't need to go there if you don't want to, but I will, because I wanted to show you some of the context there. In 1 Corinthians 3, is what actually, was the, originally the passage that I was going to focus on, but here it is.

1 Corinthians 3, verse 16 to 17. Do you not know that you are God's temple, 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.

Growing up, I looked at that verse, and I always thought that it meant, you've got to look after your body, you've got to kind of get fit, you're not allowed to have tattoos, you're not allowed to dye your hair. Well, of course, my hair died, but then, so then, dad joke.

But I realized, as we, as if you just look up, again, those who are saved, using the paper Bibles, if you just, if you just look up a little bit, if you just look up and you see, he's not talking necessarily about us, being just, how we look after our bodies, of course, in other parts of scripture, that is very true, that is very much the case, but, what he's talking about here, is actually arguments, divisions. He's, he's saying, there's some people in that church, he's like, I follow Paul, I follow Sepphas, I follow Apollos, I follow this person, I follow this person, it was basically saying, actually, it's like, my master is better than your master, and so they were arguing, but Apollos said this, and bear in mind, that Apollos, we learned from the book of Acts, was actually a very gifted speaker, very charismatic leader, so there would have been people, who were drawn towards him, so, oh no, that's not what Apollos did, and so they were fighting, they were arguing, and that's when, Paul says, no, stop, stop arguing, for you, are all, God's temple, he's addressing them, as a plural, together, you being here, you need to stop your fighting, because, because when you are together, that is when God's spirit dwells inside you, verse 18, let no one deceive himself, if anyone among you, thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool, that he may become wise, as God's temple, just like Adam and Eve, were commanded, to work and keep, the garden of Eden, the original first temple, we as the temple of God, are supposed to work, and keep, what we have here, so that it would spread outside, so that those who would see, our good works, would give a glory, to God, in heaven, it's really interesting, because if you look at the, commands to Adam and Eve, was work and keep, if you look at the Levitical priests, their commands, to look after the temple, was to work and keep, so in some ways,

[27 : 17] Adam and Eve, were the first priests, to look after this land, to cultivate it, to have dominion over it, so it would bear the image of God, the priests would then do the same, where there would be a temple, that would be prepared, intentionally curated, for people to encounter, the presence of God, we here now, fast forward, we are the church, we need to get ourselves, to a place, where we are working, and keeping what this is, so that others outside, will see, Jesus' prayer, before he died, to God the Father, was may they be as one, why?

Not just so that they can live, as a happy family, but so that they, that the world would believe, Paul here, is addressing the division, he's addressing the arguments, and yet, what we're supposed to do, is supposed to be together, as one, with the diversity, you look across, to the person next to you, like there are so many things, that are different, between you and I, sometimes we have this image, of oh, we love this church, because of the community, we love the people, we all like the same things, we all, we all, do the similar jobs, we live, we come from a similar background, you see that is one, really beautiful way, where the body of Christ, is displayed, but I don't think, that's the best, best way, the most powerful way, is when people, who come across, different backgrounds, different age groups, different social classes, those people, getting together, wow, that's, even more beautiful, that's what we're, supposed to be, how do we, in that diversity, have unity, well there's really, only one word, that can do, from diversity, to unity, the only word, that we need, is humility, that we would look, at someone else, and see them, more significant, than ourselves, that's what Paul says, in Philippians 2, that let each of us, look not only, to our own interests, but to others, and just when you think, oh that's so hard,

I have, honestly I look at my children, and I'm like, I would like to put myself first, why are you so selfish, Micah, honestly, sinner, depravity, on show, right there, crying every time, you don't get anything, what you want, such a cry baby, and yet, in that moment, I look at him, and I go, I'm going to put myself, beneath you, your interests first, now I'm forced to, because I have a child, who looks like me, I can't get away, but you don't, you guys actually, don't have to, you guys go, oh cool, see you on Sunday, when was the last time, you said, you know what, I'm going to go out, of my way for you, I'm going to, you're so different to me, actually I don't agree, with what you think, but we're going to, we're going to fight, and be together, because when we do that, when we are as one, the people on the outside, will go, why are you even hanging out with, that's so different, why, well because Christ, because Christ, and remember in Hebrews 10, we talked about, don't neglect to meet each other, consider how to stir each other up, in love and good works, encouraging each other, as the day draws near, now here's the kicker, here's the final, but we talked about,

Genesis, the garden there, the original temple, we talked about, Solomon's temple, we talked about, the temple that Herod, was rebuilding, we talked about Jesus, being the temple, we talked about us, being the temple, I'm going to fast forward, I'm going to finish very soon, so bear with me, and this book is easy to find, the book of Revelation, come with me there, to the book of Revelation, it's at the very end, the Taikid Kok, chapter 21, is this beautiful passage, what started off, as a garden, in the book of Genesis, didn't, wasn't supposed to stay, as the garden, because if Adam and Eve, did their jobs properly, and worked, and kept the garden, and cultivated it, it would then become, the garden city, and you see the vision of this, at the end, okay, and chapter 21, we've probably seen it before, then I saw a new heaven, and a new earth, for the first heaven, and the first earth, had passed away, and the sea was no more, and I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down, out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, adorned for her husband, and I heard a loud voice, from the throne, saying, behold, the dwelling place of God, is with man, he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself, will be with them, as their God, he will wipe away, every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things, have passed away, ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, the garden, will be reinstated, us dwelling in God's presence, God will dwell with them, and walk with them, isn't that beautiful, so I have this favorite quote, that there are two most important days, in anyone's life, it is today, and then it is that day, it is today, and then it is that day, when we meet him, again, and when we are dwelling, with him again, in his presence, as of that, in the garden, the key then, how we live life, is how do we live today, with that day in mind, how do we live today, and let it basically, point us towards that day, how does that day, influence our decisions, our actions, our hope, our responses, to colleagues, to bosses, to friends, to family, when you know, that this day is coming, when the veil, is completely, and actually, what I really love is, if you keep scanning towards, later in chapter 21, verse 22, and I saw no temple, in the city, for its temple, is the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, and the city, has no need of sun, or moon, to shine on it, for the glory of God, gives it light, and its lamp, is in the Lamb, there is no temple, in heaven, there is no church, that you will be late, in going to, brothers and sisters, isn't that just a relief, there isn't a cramped space, that you need to squeeze into, on a Sunday morning, let that just rest, in your thoughts, for a little bit, why, it goes back to the garden, what was the whole point, of the garden, was that we would be, with God, and at the end, the garden has now, turned into a garden city, where we will be, with God, and it won't be this, far away place, with clouds, and angels, sat playing the harp, it will be here, heaven will come on to earth, we're not going away, to another place, heaven is going to come, here on to earth, and all things, will be made new, and God will make, his dwelling place, here with his people, let that truth, permeate into every, thought that you have, that that's where, we're heading, every time you see, something horrible, devastating, heartbreaking, on the news, you look at that, and you go, wow, that's where we are heading, [34 : 13] I know the ending, of the story, that's how, you are filled with hope, that's how, we change the way, we live, finally, we will be, people of delight, of Eden, where there is no more tears, and no more pain, CS Lewis has said this, and I won't quote this again, and again, but, there's something inside us, that yearns for it, if there's nothing in this world, that can satisfy that, inside us, that's because it's something, outside, of this world, that's this deep longing, that we have, that tree, and that river, in Genesis, now makes it appearance, again, in Revelation, this river that flows, and Jesus has promised to us, is that, if we abide in him, if we stay with him, out of our heart, will flow this river, and we will be, we will have life, we will hunger, and thirst, no more, how often do you think, about heaven, how often do you think, about Eden, I think about it daily, I think about death, daily, but actually, if you just look outside now, if you're in that place, and you see, you see the trees, that are dotted around everywhere, there's something inside us, that just is, is just yearning, for that moment, that's why gardens, bring us so much peace, my wife loves gardens, and loves trees, if you want to just, be trapped in a conversation, with her for about 15, 20 minutes, just ask, just go to her later, and just go, what about them trees, and she will just go off, okay, something so beautiful, about the tree, and she told me this, when she asked me, what I was preaching, and I said, and I was like, oh no,

I'm going to say it, she's like, garden, and the trees, and she's like, did you know, the human body, our whole cardiovascular system, our veins, everything just mimics, the tree, I was like, cool, cool, cool, we're all craving for that, on Monday, Christine and I, we had our time off, and we didn't really know, what to do with ourselves, so we checked up, the cinema show times, and we found, that

Avatar was showing, has anyone watched Avatar, man, there is, the faithful are not here, of course, it's three hours, 17 of your time, it's a long time, I've always said, if it's a story, that's worth being told, it can be told in two hours, but, given that we committed to this, in 2009, in the first one, we decided just to keep following up, and just keep going, and of course, it was just a nice place, for us to chill, and rest, oh my goodness, I won't spoil it for you, there's not really much to spoil, there's people chasing, and fighting each other, and blue, big blue smurfs, and, but my goodness, it steals so much, from the Bible, the sacrifice of one, the yearning for the garden, for the tree, the tree being the place, where there is the source, of life, the moment when you turn away, from that source of life, you end up in darkness, you end up in the clan, that just chases after darkness, that is filled with bitterness, resentment, and pain,

I encourage you, if you have three hours, and 17 to spare, go and watch the film, and just let it just point you, to the Lord, it's interesting, which is this, we all have that belief inside us, whether you're a Christian, or not, you have that hunger inside you, in fact, the stories that our cultures tell, our culture tells, reflects the culture, and you see, even in this secular age, we cannot escape, those theological questions, which is, what were we made for, where are we going, why is this yearning inside us, that cannot be satisfied, here on earth, what is it that we need, we are waiting, we are yearning, we are hungry, for the garden of Eden, that is what we, and if you're sat here going, James, that's really quite hard to believe, I'm not a Christian yet, trying seeking, asking questions, but really actually, I find that concept hard, when I was like, well actually, what do you, respectfully, what do you believe in, the billions of years ago, we came from nothing, and that soon, in however many years, we're all going to collapse on ourselves, and there'll be utter darkness, is that the alternative, is that what satisfies you, intellectually, if that's, well with respect, if that's it, then good luck, but what I believe, what I see, in scripture, from beginning to end, what I see in my own heart, is that we came from a garden, and we are meant for the garden, we were created, out of community, and we are desperate for community, not with, just with each other, but with God himself, and there will be a moment, where there will be no more tears, no more pain, no more temple, because we'll be with him, and we will be filled, with delight, if I can just allow us, to leave here, with that vision, that we will be filled, with delight, and any darkness that we see, will soon be dealt with, and gone, because of what Christ did,

I will have succeeded, what do we do, as a church then, if I've convinced you, that there is this garden, at the beginning, and there will be a garden city, at the end, what does that mean, for you right now, if that is the day, we're heading for, what do we do today, let's finish back, at 1 Peter 2, you are the living stones, built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer sacrifices, spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God, through Jesus Christ, further on later, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, one thing that we can do, is to be holy, Florence, what does the word holy mean, set apart, different, if your action point today, is you leave this church, and you go to your friends, and you got colleagues, and they just see something, different in you, we'll be in the right direction, would we just be different, when can people just look at us, and go, wow, the way you do your job, is just different, normal people don't work, like that, normal people don't study, like that, there's just something, different about you,

I know that we've met people, who are just different, if you use a Christianese term, that is, they are holy, they are set apart, would we be people, who are set apart, would we be people, who are so just, concerned with, building the house of the Lord, and presenting it to him, in a way that is undefiled, uncompromised, pure, you've been yearning, to see God, blessed are those, who are pure in heart, for they shall see God, well the quote, if you want to see God, then you work on the first part, blessed are those, who are pure in heart, what does that mean, that you are single-mindedly, wholly devoted, to seeing him, and those who seek him, will find him, would we be holy, would we commit, to being different, be that community, that is, filled with diversity, filled with annoying people, yet still, chooses to love, yet still, chooses to go out, of our way, how can we be that garden, and it says, towards the end, keep your conduct, among the Gentiles, honorable, so that when they speak, against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds, and glorify God, on the day of visitation,

[41 : 19] Peter didn't say, this was necessary himself, he heard Jesus, talk about those, in the sermon on the mount, that we would be, a city on a hill, that we would be, the salt and light, of the earth, and that when others, see that we are different, that when others see, that we go out of our way, to do good deeds, they'll look and go, there's something different, about that group, them, collectively together, they are the temple, of God, they are the people of God, one of my favorite

times, in the week, is 1030, on a Sunday, and this isn't, oh this is actually, a shameless plug, for that, we deliberately, intentionally, try and create, and curate, a space and time here, before you come in, with your coffee, to pray, and honestly, I can come in, having whatever week, that I've had, sometimes with, Micah clinging on my shoulder, and moaning, and all that kind of stuff, but the moment, I sit down, and be, with his people, and pray, and I watch people, walking quietly, well sometimes, you're talking outside, and the moment you walk in, and then you're like, oh people are praying, and then you kind of, quieten down,

I love that, why? Because we are intentionally, creating a space, a place, where the people of God, can hunger, for the presence of God, and I am filled, I realize that, I've been trying to do it alone, this week, but the moment I come in, and I hear people pray, and I hear people pray, with scripture, it just blesses my soul, no end, and I realize, okay, that's what I've been missing, people, fellow stones, in the temple of God, and I give thanks, I pray, that you and I, would have the same experience, that Janice had last week, that every time, we're drawn into this space, we're pulled away, from the world's distractions, our hearts are recalibrated, our focus is, reoriented, back towards God, we are filled up, we're reminded of the garden, and then we leave, filled with delight, pursuing, that garden again,

I'd like to invite you, just to spend a moment now, to ask the Lord yourself, you've heard me speak enough, my prayer is that you would, hear from the Lord, what is it about the garden, that you crave, what is it that is stopping you, from experiencing, that presence, and to ask together, as a collective body, Lord, how can we surrender, our hearts again to you, that you would dwell with us, that you would dwell, amongst the praises, of your people, of your people, of your people, as St. Augustine said, you have made us, for yourself,

O God, and our hearts, are restless, until they rest, in you, I'll finish, with a final quote, John Eldridge says this, we were born, into a world at war, and we have spent, our lives, trying to get back, to the garden, trying to get home, all our longings, for beauty, for intimacy, for adventure, are echoes, of Eden.

Yes, Lord, we are your temple, we are your children, and we thank you, that you dwell, in your children's praises, that you are a father, that knows us, each by name, and that it delights, in you, when we delight, in you, and so God, help us this week, as we leave, from this fifth floor, that our worship, does not end here, and that we continue, to live a life, of worship, as we live a life, that others around us, in our neighbors, our colleagues, our classmates, that they see, that our eyes, are on something else, our eyes are not, just on our boss, or our deadline, or our professor, Lord, our eyes are on you, the ultimate creator, the ruler, the king of kings, and the lord of lords, and we look to you, not with fear, and anxiety, but we look to you, with deep trust, deep surrender, knowing all that you've, done for us, and so Lord, we pray, that we be your church, today here, in Hong Kong, we pray this, in Jesus mighty name,
[46:35] Amen.