



WEEK 8

WHERE CAN I MEET GOD?

GOD'S PLACE

People throughout history have thought of particular locations as points of access to the divine realm. From ancient mountain-top temples to gothic cathedrals, from religious pilgrimage destinations to sacred burial sites; humanity has had an instinct that to meet God, you had to be in the right *place*.

But it's not just humanity. In the Bible we meet a God who hasn't just been keen to have a people who belong to him. He wants to **be with them**. To enjoy the kind of close relationship that's only possible when you're together in the same physical space.

EPISODE 1 - CREATION

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

1. Thinking back to Episode 1, what do you know about what God's place was in that era? What do you think it would have been like to be there?

2. What do you think was the significance of humanity being exiled from the garden?

EPISODE 2 - COVENANT

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you..."

God's first act in Episode 2 is to call a man into a new place to live with Him as his god: Canaan. The promised land. A new Eden. And when his people become enslaved in the anti-Eden of Egyptian slavery, he rescues them and brings them back into that land, giving it to them as their own.

But with sin still infecting the hearts of humanity, the new Eden is unlike the old one. You can't physically walk with God or see him face to face. In fact the sights and sounds of God's glorious presence make Israelites fear for their lives!

But there is one place within the land where God's people can - where they must - go to meet him. The new limited-access garden. The tabernacle.

3. Many Bible scholars have suggested that the tabernacle/temple was designed to represent a new garden of Eden. A new place where God's people could have access to him. What do you think?

To spice up your conversation, the sidebar lists some similarities between Eden and the tabernacle. Look up any bible references that intrigue you.

GENESIS 3

8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden...

23 So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.²⁴ After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

TEMPLE = EDEN?

God habitually 'walks about' both in the garden (Gen 3:8) and in the tabernacle/temple (Lev 26:11-12).

God puts Adam in the garden to "work it and keep it" (Gen 2:15) which are also the duties of a priest in the temple sanctuary (Num 3:7-8; 18:5-6; 1Chron 23:32)

The insides of the temple and its pillars were decorated with flowers and fruits as if representing a garden. (1 Kings 6:18, 29, 32, 35 & 7:18-20)

The rivers flowing from Eden indicate that it was on a mountain (see also Ezek 28:13-16), and the Jerusalem temple was built on a mountain, Mt Zion.

The entrance to the garden faced East (Gen 3:24), as did the entrances to the tabernacle and the temple.

The way back to Eden was guarded by cherubim (Gen 3:24). The curtain separating the central room of the temple (which people were forbidden from entering) had cherubim woven into it.

EXODUS 20

18 When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance¹⁹ and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." ...²¹ The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

LEVITICUS 16

1 The Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the Lord.² The Lord said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die. For I will appear in the cloud over the atonement cover."

JOHN 1

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ...¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

JOHN 3

13 When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.¹⁴ In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money.¹⁵ So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ...¹⁸ The Jews then responded to him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."²⁰ They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?"²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body.²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said.

4. Read the Exodus and Leviticus sidebars. What's different about Israel's access to God in episode 2 to Adam and Eve's in episode 1?

Sadly, though, even this limited access to God was lost as Israel - like Adam and Eve before them - was exiled from its land. In 740 BC the Northern kingdom was conquered and exiled by Assyria and the Southern exile into Babylonian captivity began around 600BC. In 598 BC, the Babylonians destroyed the temple itself.

Since the exile from the garden of Eden, all humanity has been estranged from God. But now even the people through whom God promised to rescue humanity have been cut off from their (limited) access to God's presence. In his judgement for their sin God has cut their access to him completely. All hope for humanity being with their God seems lost.

EPISODE 3 - CHRIST

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

5. What is the new 'place' designated by God where the divine and human are united?

6. In what sense is Jesus' body a 'temple'?

Despite this history of repeated separation because of sin, God came closer to humanity than anyone could have imagined: he became one of us. God's 'place' in episode 3 isn't geographical. The place where God is united with humanity is in the person of Jesus himself! "The Word became flesh." God is united with humanity in the fully-human and fully-divine Christ.

Not only this, but Jesus himself is the place where all people can come to re-connect with God. A new way of accessing relationship with God. A whole new temple, but one where the sacrifice for our sins has already been made for us.

EPISODE 4 - NEW COVENANT

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple?

With the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, a new agreement is set up between God and humanity. What implications does this have for God's 'place'?

7. Read Ephesians 2 (sidebar). What do you make of the fact that the 'you' in verse 22 is plural, yet the 'dwelling in which God lives' is singular?

8. If MPC as a community is 'being built together to become a dwelling place in which God lives by his Spirit', what implications does that have for how we think, speak and act towards each other?

EPISODE 5 - NEW CREATION

They were longing for a better country—a heavenly one.

Though God lives in the hearts of believers by his Spirit, we're still not 'with him' in a physical sense. We're exiles, still living outside the garden, awaiting our final journey home. So what will it be like in the end?

9. Read Revelation 21-22 (sidebar). What does this picture of the new heavens and earth remind you of?

10. If this perfectly renewed creation is something that God will bring about in the future (episode 5), how should that affect the way we speak, feel and act in the present (episode 4)?

What an incredible privilege it is that God would choose to come and make his home in our human hearts by his Spirit. And not only that, but to be looking forward to being with him in the new garden of Eden - the new Jerusalem - and to walk and talk with him, face to face. Pray that we will have the humility, courage and wisdom to continually go to Jesus and nowhere else for divine connection!

EPHESIANS 2

17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.¹⁸ For through [Jesus] we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

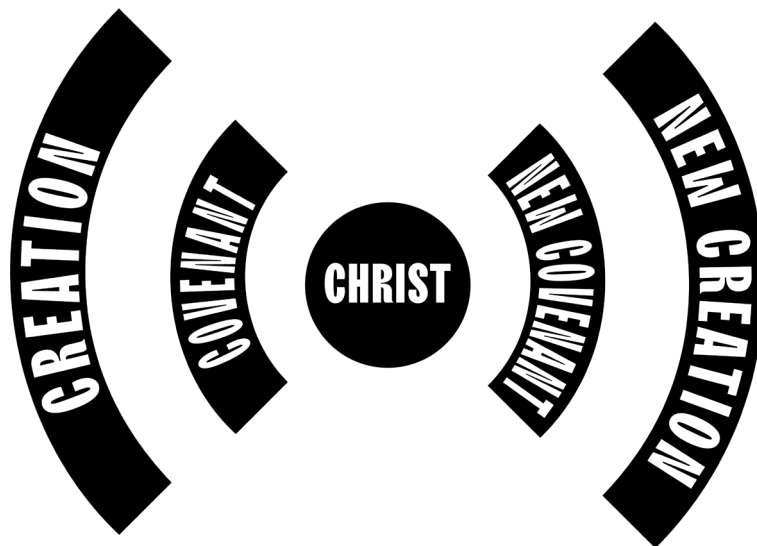
REVELATION 21

1 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.² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.³ 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."⁴ "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"

22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

REVELATION 22

1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.³ No longer will there be any curse.





MITCHELTON PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, 2020