

24th May 2020 6pm Covenant, Exodus and Temple Talk by Andrew Attwood

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Okay, well, it's good to see you this evening. My name is Andrew, I'm the vicar of St. John's Church. This is our 6pm evening, focusing on this particular evening, on some in-depth Bible teaching.

But just a quick encouragement, like you've just seen the video [about 24x7 prayer between Ascension and Pentecost 2020] that a number of people have already been signing up from St. John's. Can I encourage as many people as possible to buy into this sequence of prayer as we head towards Pentecost? It's good for you, it's good for the church, and it's good for the world to be praying in a focused way at this particular time. So seek out our website [www.stjohn316.co.uk] and join in.

What we're going to be doing tonight is in-depth teaching that relates a little bit to something that I did about a month ago, which is to do with giving you keys and ways and things to understand the whole scope of the Bible better, so that we get beyond simply doing a set of readings and reading that bit. Understanding, in fact, something broader and wider. This evening, I wanted to concentrate on three particular words: **Covenant, Exodus, and Temple**. And I want you to think of them like keys. Imagine that you were given a set of three keys by God. Imagine he just drops three keys in your hands and he says, "Go, explore my house," and you unlock doors and you unlock doors and you're in and around, and you get to open doors and see what it's like on the inside. That's what this is all about. It helps you understand more deeply, more thoroughly, where the whole narrative of the Bible goes, and how this reveals much more what God is like. There are other words that we could easily do this same treatment to, like the word Kingdom, or Sacrifice or the word Grace. But I wanted to concentrate on these three because they're kind of foundational words.

So we will kick off in a moment. But just before we do, I wanted to give us a space to prepare ourselves to be teachable. So we're going to have a moment of quiet. And we're going to have a moment of stillness in God's presence so that we can be ready to receive and to learn.

So let's be quiet.

And in the quiet, we come to God, and we acknowledge that we have limited knowledge. Just in your own words acknowledge that you don't know everything.

And in the quiet, recognise that right now God desires to teach you.

Be open to the God who wants to teach you something that you don't presently know.

And now bring to God your ability to listen and your ability to learn. Let's honour God by being attentive, attentive to what's being shared, but also attentive to him, as a way of honouring him.

And so that we actually have the capacity to receive something from God, let's wait for God's Holy Spirit now to give us ears to hear.

Come Holy Spirit.

And so, Father God, we come to you with openness, with a desire to learn.
Inspire us, in Jesus name,
Amen.

Covenant

Okay, I want to begin, first of all, with the word **Covenant**.

Obviously, this is something that begins right way back in the Old Testament. Linguistically, the idea of Covenant first appears in the Bible with Noah. You may remember the Noah's story where God makes the promise with Noah that he would never flood the earth again. But the actual detail, the actual detail of what God does, is, in fact, much more fleshed-out in Genesis 15. If you have your Bibles with you, it'll be useful for you to be to be keeping your hand in your Bible because we're going to be finding different passages that open up these scriptures in very specific ways. And I'm going to be reading from Genesis 15 just for a moment, to give you a taste of this formative covenant that God did with Abraham or Abram, as he was known then. It says this in Genesis 15, starting at verse 4,

⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to him: 'This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.'⁵ He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the sky and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring^[d] be.'

⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

⁷ He also said to him, 'I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.'

⁸ But Abram said, 'Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I shall gain possession of it?'

⁹ So the LORD said to him, 'Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.'

¹⁰ Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half.¹¹ Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

¹² As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him.¹³ Then the LORD said to him, 'Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and ill-treated there.

¹⁴ But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterwards they will come out with great possessions.¹⁵ You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age.

¹⁶ In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.'

¹⁷ When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking brazier with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.

So we have this extremely unusual story, unusual to our Western ears, where Abraham makes a treaty with Almighty God. And that's how they used to do it in those days, tribal leaders would lay out dead animals in a line and they would speak to each other and make agreements. And yet you will hear from the reading of that story, that in that situation, Abraham doesn't contribute to the covenant! God puts him to sleep. God makes him utterly passive. And God in the

form of a blazing torch moves all the way through, both to Abraham's side and from God's side, saying, "I will do my bit and I will do your bit." So this first covenant was an unconditional agreement, and it was unilaterally chosen by God.

This kind of repeats some of the echoes you get all the way back to the Garden of Eden with the promise of the land, and the idea of an Adam, Adam and Eve being Fathers of the nations. So Abraham is taking up the mantle from the Garden of Eden. But things don't go smoothly. Even from the very beginning there was prophesied by God, that there would be enslavement, that the thing wouldn't go as smoothly as we might have imagined.

You get the Mosaic Covenant coming next, in Exodus 20. We have Moses going up the mountain of Sinai, and he comes back with the law for the people to obey. So this is after they've been brought out of Egypt. And the law is given to Moses as a new covenant, different to the one that Abraham had, because it's conditional, it's not unconditional, like it was with Abraham. The law is given to provide and to protect, but it's also given to reveal. It's also given to reveal. It says in Deuteronomy 31:24-29, that this law is going to be a witness against the people of Israel. It's really intriguing: it's a law to live by, but in Deuteronomy 31:24-29, Moses holds this book up, this set of writings, and says "This will speak against you, Israel, because it will describe what you can't keep." So you have the people of Israel given a law, given a new covenant, and they can't keep it. They really, really struggle. They struggle to hold on to what God has said.

And so then later on in the story of Israel, you have another covenant being prophesied about. This time if you were to turn in your Bibles to Jeremiah 31, you will find something being spoken about, that points further forwards to something new, that was going to come to replace the Mosaic covenant. This time, there are words that describe things that are going to be significantly different. Verse 31 says this,

³¹ 'The days are coming,' declares the LORD,
 'when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
 and with the people of Judah.

³² It will not be like the covenant
 I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
 to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,
 though I was a husband to them,'
declares the LORD.

³³ 'This is the covenant that I will make with the people of Israel
 after that time,' declares the LORD.
'I will put my law in their minds
 and write it on their hearts.
I will be their God,
 and they will be my people.

³⁴ No longer will they teach their neighbour,
 or say to one another, "Know the LORD,"
because they will all know me,

from the least of them to the greatest,'
declares the LORD.

'For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more.'

So Jeremiah prophesies something that is going to be different from the Mosaic development. He's looking ahead to the time of Messiah, he's looking ahead to the time when things are going to be changed again and it will be back to unconditional, with all of the stuff to do with sin resolved, because that was the downfall for the people of Israel. You may remember, right at the beginning of Mark's gospel, you have this declaration from Jesus: he says this: "The time is fulfilled, Repent and believe the good news." The time is fulfilled. He's basically saying now, from now on, things are going to be different. You see, Jesus comes as the new, true Israel. He was going to fulfil the law and the sacrifice that atones all the lawbreakers. You will find this embedded all the way through the Gospel writings, you will find Jesus living out the law in all kinds of ways. But most explicitly, he talks about Covenant by the time we get to where? To the Last Supper. So if you turn in your Bibles again to Matthew 26, and we go to verse 26, we'll read from there, this is what it says.

²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.'

²⁷ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'

So, very self-consciously, Jesus is drawing down upon himself all the old covenants and making a new one that is going to be written, not with a signature on a contract, it's going to be written in blood. It's going to be the sacrifice that fulfils all of the Old Testament sacrifices, and it's going to be a new covenant that fulfils all that Jeremiah was pointing to, when God will not remember their sins any longer. So, Last Supper language, really, really profound.

Turn with me in your Bibles now, to Hebrews. You see, the Bible is full of richness and all the way through you will find this theme of Covenant repeated again and again. If you go to chapter 9 of Hebrews, you will find the idea of a new covenant spelled out in absolute glorious detail. Hebrews 9 starting at verse 11 says this:

¹¹ But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. ¹² He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, so obtaining eternal redemption. ¹³ The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. ¹⁴ How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

¹⁵ For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

So this idea of Covenant is something that trails all the way through with Jesus entering into the holy place, something not made up by hands, which goes so deep and so much further than anything Moses or even Abraham could have conceived. We're back into something that is now unconditional. In fact, there's only one condition to the new covenant and that is trusting in Jesus Christ. He does everything else.

So let me just explain to you again, in summary, what covenant means. Covenant is a picture of God's desire to know us, God's desire to be committed to us. It's a bit like a wedding ring. But this particular covenant that develops all the way through the Bible, is a commitment that demands people to live with the Holy God, and God knows we can't. And so he out of love, gives us the means by which we can draw close and know God through his Son, Jesus Christ.

This is a fixed arrangement, just like my wedding ring tells me, I have committed to my wife, till death us do part. The Covenant says, I will never leave you, I will never forsake you, because of what Jesus has done, fixed, past tense. So Covenant language is extremely reassuring. It gives us a picture of God as not a capricious God who's going to change his minds about us, depending on how we behave. He relates to us as people under the New Covenant. We are adopted into a new relationship, because of the status Jesus gives us. So this is a very safe, and a very secure principle that God wants us to know and embrace. I love the idea of Covenant: it means that I can be secure in God even when I mess up.

So that's Covenant.

Exodus

Let's move on to the theme of **Exodus**. Exodus obviously has strong connections with all of this, but I wanted to emphasise the fact that Exodus is Story. It's not just an idea. Covenant is very much a kind of an idea, a concept. Exodus is very much rooted in actual Story, where God defines himself as the one who rescues, he's the one who leads people out. Exodus as a word means departure, and he's saying, "You're coming with me, you're going out."

The people of Israel, at the time of Exodus, on the day of Exodus, as you will remember, were shielded by God from the various plagues that were happening while they were in Egypt. And he shields them on the last occasion, from the Angel of Death who was passing over the land of Egypt. That's where we get the word Passover from. The Exodus set them free, and set them on a new footing away from oppressors. It's very important to realise that Exodus is being set free *from* something, not just being set free *for* something. The thing that's intriguing is that Moses spends a huge amount of time in his laws and then the festivals and in the customs that you will read all the way through Deuteronomy, Leviticus and all the rest, with storytelling that re-enacts the story of Exodus again and again and again. We have Passover repeated. We have things to wear, things on our foreheads, we have patterns, we have psalms to sing. We have the prophets of the Old Testament, singing and praying and prophesying with Exodus language over and over again.

Why was the people of Israel taught to embed this idea of Exodus in their hearts and minds and in their calendar so deeply? It's to teach them that this is what God is like all the time. By God actually setting the people free in history, he was revealing to the people of Israel, "That's what I'm like. I am a rescuing God. I am a God who brings emancipation. I rescue you specifically out of things that you can't control. You are oppressed and you will be enslaved by forces, but I am stronger than the gods of Egypt. I am stronger than anything that oppresses you. I am the powerful God. I am the one who sets people free." And so you will have all the way through the story of Israel from Exodus onwards, mini-Exoduses, because Israel falls into sin, they sometimes go into exile, but at different points God brings them back. These if you like are mini-Exoduses where

he rescues them again from a new set of enemies and sets them back into the land. That's all about God revealing himself as the God of rescue.

So we get to the New Testament understanding of Exodus. What does Jesus do right at the beginning of his ministry? He's baptised by John, and what's the first command of the Holy Spirit to Jesus? Into the wilderness! Jesus goes into the wilderness to be tested for 40 days. Why? Because the nation of Israel was tested for 40 years in the wilderness. Why does Jesus gather 12 disciples? Because there were 12 tribes of Israel. So poetically, he's embodying himself as a picture of the new Israel. But what I wanted to draw your attention to is something that you will find in Mark's gospel. If you can turn in Mark's gospel and find chapter 3, you will find something extraordinary that echoes some of the strong emphases that you have with regards to acts of Exodus. Mark 3, starting at verse 23. And this is where Jesus is describing himself as the one who was stronger. Verse 23 begins like this.

²³ So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: 'How can Satan drive out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. ²⁶ And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. ²⁷ In fact, (and this is the important bit) no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house. ²⁸ Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.'

Why is Jesus talking about strong men and tying people up and plundering houses? He's describing his own ministry, he's describing what he was doing again and again with individuals. You will recognise him in the Gospel accounts, Jesus setting people free from things that oppressed them, often using demonic language to describe what was going on. And when he sets these people free, he's setting them free from powers that they themselves can't deal with. There's someone stronger who has to come in, to effectively tie up what is oppressing them, and then setting the captive free. All of this has echoes with Jesus' own manifesto that you read in Luke 4. But Jesus describes himself as effectively stronger than the existing strong man, stronger than the ones who were oppressing. And he basically says, I'm the new Exodus. I'm the God of Exodus. I'm the one who can defeat, if you like, the gods of Pharaoh, the gods of Egypt. And just like back then, I'm bringing rescue and liberty and departure for individuals who need to be set free.

You might remember, in Luke's account of the Transfiguration, you can find this if you like, at another time, Luke 9, verse 31. Jesus goes up the mountain, and he goes with just a few disciples, and there he is transfigured before them. Bright, shining light. There's something revealed about who Jesus really is. And intriguingly, who appears with Jesus? Moses and Elijah, the law and the prophets, so the Old Covenant, the old message that captured and included the question of departure and freedom, and God's holiness. There, they're talking with Jesus. And what does it say? It says in Luke's account that Moses and Elijah were discussing his departure, or to use other translations, they were discussing his Exodus that was going to happen at Jerusalem. What are they talking about? What is Moses saying to Jesus, when he's talking about Jesus' Exodus at Jerusalem. Moses could see that Jesus is going to have to go through his own Exodus, to set the people free.

Think about what Jesus does in terms of timing. When does Jesus do the Last Supper? At Passover! Jesus wants the message to be loud and clear. Symbolically, he is saying this bread and this cup at this time is the new Passover, is the new moment when Exodus is going to happen. So we have the story of the Last Supper embodying Exodus in New Testament terms.

Here's a perhaps poetic and even painful thought: when Jesus was on the Cross, you get a reference to them holding up a stick with a sponge on it, to give him some kind of quenching, to help him while he's dying on the Cross. And it says they held up a hyssop stick. Just imagine for Jesus, them holding up a stick of hyssop and because he knew the Passover story so well, he would know that when they originally put blood on the lintels of the door from the lamb to protect them from the Angel of Death, it was with a hyssop stick that they covered the blood on the doorways to protect them so that death would pass over.

And here we have the Lamb of God, and the blood of the Lamb, and the hyssop stick, offered to quench his thirst. It's all utterly, utterly one story. The Exodus is happening on the Cross now, Jesus is winning a victory to set people free. And of course, he's completely embedded in this. You will know he's referencing and he's thinking of Isaiah 53. When Jesus describes himself in Mark 10, verse 45, he says, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." That's lifted straight out of Isaiah 53, which is Exodus language, it's sacrificial language. It is language where someone pays so that others can go free. It's a transaction. It's a complete fulfilment of everything to do with Exodus.

Turn with me and your Bibles again, and see if you can find 1 Corinthians 5. 1 Corinthians 5, verse 7, shows that the early Church entirely embraced language of Exodus to make it apply to themselves. It says there, verse seven,

⁷ Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch – as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

Christ, *our* Passover Lamb has been sacrificed. So the connection with Jesus and Exodus is really tight. I just want to to emphasise this to you, God is still a God of Exodus. God is still a God of rescue. Whatever your circumstances now, whatever entanglements there may be in your life, whatever there is that controls you that you can't get free from, whatever oppresses your circumstances, that is tailor-made for the God of Israel, for Jesus Christ to set you free, because he is an Exodus God. He is a God who sets people free.

Temple

So he's a Covenant God, he's an Exodus God, he's also a God, which has people worship Him in the context of **Temple**. This is the third word that I want to bring to your attention today. Temple is something that we don't quite understand as Christians. We're familiar with church gatherings and meeting together, but Temple is something quite particular and we need to understand Temple theology if we need to understand what it is that God wants us to understand about himself, particularly to do with his presence. Here's something that you may not be aware of: the first appearance of the idea of Temple is not when Solomon built it and it's not even later on in the story, when you have the Tent of Meeting, the Tabernacle in the wilderness, and I'll mention that in a moment. Many theologians would regard the story of the Garden of Eden as being written with Temple language in mind. We have the creation story, where it describes everything that has been made by God. And right at the centre of this creation is a garden with people attending to God in his presence. It's almost as though the Garden of Eden is the first Holy of Holies. The Garden of Eden has a Tree of Life. Later on in Solomon's Temple you will see lampstands that are designed to be like a tree. In the garden of Eden, you have the Tree with the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which is very much like the Ark of the Covenant. That was in the Tent of Meeting which revealed what was right and what was wrong. When you see the designs of Solomon's Temple, much later in the story you will find that it's got carvings all over it with fruit and pomegranates, and they've designed the Temple to be almost like a garden. So the designers of

Solomon's Temple seem to be pointing as back to the Garden of Eden as the archetype.

So Temple language is there from the beginning. Why is that important? It's because God is a God who is present with his people. God isn't remote. God isn't a God who simply wants to be theoretically known and acknowledged at a distance. The idea of Temple language is that God's presence is actually going to come and be with his people. You may remember, when the people of Israel were sent out into the wilderness from Egypt, there was this sense of God's presence, gathering around them was the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. And when Moses would go into the Tent of Meeting, the people would stand at the mouths of their own tents, and they would worship and praise God, because the cloud would gather over the entrance of the tent, and they would know "God is here. God is literally here."

We struggle to get our minds around the idea of God being located. I think in the West, we've made, at a philosophical level, the jump to say, well, God's everywhere, isn't he? Yes, he is. But in the Bible story, we see that the God of Israel chooses to locate his tangible presence in a particular time, and in a particular place. He brings his holiness to bear right amongst his people. And the problem with that is that the people can't cope with his presence. In fact, early on in the Exodus accounts, you find them rebelling and committing sin and God is wanting to walk away from them. There's an exchange you have in Exodus 33, where God is actually speaking to Moses and saying, we're going to go and find a new people. And you can lead them, because these people are stiff-necked and rebellious. But Moses says this: this is Exodus 33, verses 15 to 16:

¹⁵ Then Moses said to him, 'If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.

¹⁶ How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?'

Moses knew that the actual tangible presence of the living God was what defined them. So this idea of hosting the Presence of God was fundamental to Moses' understanding of being a believer, it meant God was going to be with you. You find later on in the accounts when David is established in Jerusalem and Solomon finally gets permission to build an actual Temple for God, that God's tangible Presence comes in an extraordinary way. 2 Chronicles 7 verses 1-3 says this, this is Solomon dedicating the Temple. And it says,

¹ When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. ² The priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it. ³ When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshipped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying,

'He is good;
his love endures for ever.'

Just like when they were in the wilderness, and they would stand at the mouth of their tents, and they would worship God because the cloud was there and pillar of fire was there, now, God had taken up residence, if you like, in the holy centre of the Temple that was built in Jerusalem. To cope with God's presence, they set up all of the Levitical sacrifices, so that they could bear to be in the presence of a holy God. It's something we can't quite imagine, that you can't go near a holy God without all of these things in place.

So where does this lead us to, from a New Testament point of view? You will have heard dozens and dozens of times the reference in John's gospel, the idea of

Jesus coming, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and the word there is "tabernacled amongst us". It's very clear that John as an author is saying, "Jesus is like the new Tent of Meeting." Jesus is the new place where God is present, different from the Temple of Jerusalem. Now, he's here in the flesh. But let me find a different part of John's gospel that gives something else to this understanding. You see, there's an early exchange that Jesus has when he is in conflict with people who are questioning him and challenging his views and his behaviour. John 2 verse 18, says this:

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. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

So from the beginning of Jesus' ministry, again, self-consciously, he's very aware of this. He knows he has come to replace a Temple with his own body. He's going to be the new Temple for the people of God. What does that mean?

What does that mean for the Son of God to become the new dwelling place for God and his people? To go all the way back to the Garden of Eden, it's a retelling of the Garden story, where God walks in the cool of the day, and Adam and Eve are with him, serving Him. It's a retelling of the Meeting Tent in the wilderness. It's a retelling of the actual Temple, when the glory of God came and filled it and drove all the priests out because they couldn't cope. But this time, Jesus has come as God's person and God's presence in the flesh.

So what does this mean for us as Christians? Because it's not just Jesus being a Temple, because Jesus says "I want you to be in me," there is a sense in which God wants *us* to be part of his new Temple in replacement of the Jerusalem Temple. 1 John 4 verse 13 says this.

¹³ This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: he has given us of his Spirit.

Let me say that again. "This is how we know that we live in him, and he in us: he has given us of his Spirit." The experience of early Christians was the idea of Jesus' indwelling them. This idea of being indwelt is Temple language, the Presence of God has come, and we are in him mysteriously, and he is in us, by his Spirit.

In fact, this becomes, if you like, a hallmark as to why the Church needs to be not only hosting the Presence of God, but holy as a result of hosting the Presence of God. The church is the new Temple of a holy God, hosting His holy presence. 1 Corinthians 3:16 says this, when Paul is beginning to address some questionable behaviour that's happening in the Corinthian community, he says this, 1 Corinthians 3:16. [NIV USA]

¹⁶ Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's Temple, and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?

So all of the ancient language, the ancient concept of Temple is now embodied in the individual believer, but also in the community of Christians. How we live as individuals, how we live as a community, is to be thought through very carefully

because we now host the very Presence of God. Temple language, Temple theology, helps us understand that the Christian faith isn't a philosophy where it's just a set of ideas. It's a tangible hosting of God himself with us, which was always there, from the beginning, always there as part of the original design.

Conclusion

So that's three keys to consider. All of these keys unlock all different kinds of aspects of the Bible story.

The **Covenant** gives you a clear picture of what God is like in his commitment to us, despite and regardless of behaviour.

Exodus describes the nature and the character of God. He is a rescuing God, and he is absolutely resolutely going to do it. And Jesus takes up that baton, where he says, "I'm stronger than the strong man, I will tie up anything that controls, I will tie up anything that oppresses and set you free because I'm the Exodus God."

And the **Temple** theology reveals a God who says, "I'm not going to teach you from afar. I'm going to dwell with you on the inside of who you are. And I'm going to fill everything through you, and out into your community of believers and out into the wider world," so that the whole earth in the end becomes part of his Temple presence.

So you get the Great Commission. Jesus says right at the end of Matthew, Matthew 28, [verses 18-20]

'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me (So he makes all the land the Holy Land now).¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

That great commission captures the idea of Covenant. It captures the idea of Exodus, it captures the idea of Temple: "I will be with you to the end of the age." It's all there. It all makes sense. It all becomes alive when you see Jesus Christ fulfilling these key Bible ideas.

I'm going to finish there. Covenant, Exodus, Temple, I encourage you, go do your own reading. Search the Scriptures, find out where Covenant is mentioned, find out where Exodus repeats through the songs, or through the rituals or through the festivals. Find out where Temple theology takes you. So you can find Temple references in the New Testament, and it will enrich your idea of what God is like.

Remember, God wants to give you a set of keys and says, "Just go explore my house, go find out what I'm like, go through the keyhole. See what I'm like, learn what I'm like as a Covenant God, as an Exodus God, as a Temple God."

Let me pray.

Lord Jesus, so much of this is almost too rich to digest in one sitting.

But I pray for those who watching and for those who listen, you would set in their hearts and in mind an appetite to understand more deeply -

your covenant grace,

your desire to rescue

and your passion to be present.

Would you teach us? Would you take us deeper? And would you help us now, to follow you more closely? In Jesus Holy Name, Amen.

So God bless you. Thank you for listening. I hope that was useful to you. If you want to give us any feedback and please do email [vicar@stjohn316.co.uk] or leave comments. I look forward to seeing you again sometime. Bless you.

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