

## 1 High Places . . .

- The most overlooked sin of the Old Testament.

## 2 Review

- When the children of Israel are ready to cross the Jordan, Moses gives them the following directives concerning their worship.
  - They are not to worship the Lord their God according to the pattern that the pagans use to worship their gods.
  - He tells them to completely destroy all their High places and shrines.
  - He commands them to break down all their altars, smash all their sacred stones, burn their Asherah poles and wipe out the names of their gods from those places.
- Not only are they not to worship the LORD according to the patterns and forms used by the pagans, but they are to stop sacrificing as they have been doing—as everyone sees fit. (Deut. 12:8)

## 3 Review

- Once they enter the Promise Land and God gives them rest, Moses tells the people, to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling.
- To that place you must go; there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. (Deut 12:5–6 NIV)
- Again Moses warns the people, [b]e careful not to sacrifice your burnt offerings anywhere you please. Offer them only at the place the LORD will choose in one of your tribes, and there observe everything I command you. (Deut 12:13–14 NIV)

## 4 Jerusalem - Mount Zion

- So then, when did God give Israel peace? And what tribe did he choose to place his Name and dwelling place?
- According to the writer of 1 Chronicles, it was during the reign of king Solomon.
  - David said to Solomon: “My son, I had it in my heart to build a house for the Name of the LORD my God. But this word of the LORD came to me: ‘You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight. But you will have a son who will be a man of peace and rest, and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side. His name will be Solomon, and I will grant Israel peace and quiet during his reign. He is the one who will build a house for my Name. He will be my son, and I will be his father. And I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.’ (1 Chr 22:7–10 NIV)

## 5 Jerusalem - Mount Zion

- In Psalms 78 & 132 this theme is restated as it declares,

- Then he rejected the tents of Joseph, he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim; but he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which he loved. He built his sanctuary like the heights, like the earth that he established forever. (Psa 78:67–69 NIV)
- For the LORD has chosen Zion, he has desired it for his dwelling: “This is my resting place for ever and ever; here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it — “ (Psa 132:13–14 NIV)

## 6 Jerusalem - Mount Zion

- When Solomon dedicates the Temple in Jerusalem, he on several occasions during his speech, connects the event to God’s promise in Deuteronomy 12, when God will after giving Israel peace on every side, choose the site of His dwelling place.
  - “When your people go to war against their enemies, wherever you send them, and when they pray to the LORD toward the city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name,” (1 Kings 8:44 NIV)
  - “. . . and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies who took them captive, and pray to you toward the land you gave their fathers, toward the city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name;” (1 Kings 8:48 NIV)
  - “When your people go to war against their enemies, wherever you send them, and when they pray to you toward this city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name, . . .” (2 Chr 6:34 NIV)

## 7 Solomon’s Temple

- So then, it was during the reign of Solomon that God, (through David), gave Israel peace on every side and chose for his dwelling place, Jerusalem.
- It was there, the house that Solomon built (temple), where all burnt offerings, tithes, and special gifts were to be taken to sacrifice to the Lord.
- To do otherwise, would go against what God had instituted and sanctioned.
- Kings who upheld this directive were viewed as faithful, righteous, and true, but those who made concessions and allowed the people to offer their sacrifices at the place of their choosing were viewed negatively.

## 8 The Point

- The point of all of this, is that the sovereign Lord is the one who defines the content and form of worship and this should not be ignored or compromised.
- Pagan worship, on the other hand, is not based on revelation, but on greed (Col. 3:5) and should be abandoned, rejected, and disowned.
- So then, we must be very careful to worship the right God in the right way.

## 9 Form and Function

- However, forms can easily be corrupted by insincere hearts—where religious observances become a coverup for immorality and wickedness.
- This happened with the Pharisees during Jesus’ day, when food law, sabbaths, and temple worship were more important than justice, mercy, and faithfulness—the more important matters of the law (Matthew 23:23).

#### 10 **Form vs. Essence**

- So, when Jesus tells the woman at the well that a day is coming where “place” will no longer be important and that “true worshippers” won’t have to concern themselves with sacrificial and ceremonial righteousness any longer, is huge.
- All that “true worshippers” will have to concern themselves with is essence—in keeping with the truth.
- Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Mic 6:7–8 NIV)

#### 11 **Essence**

- This whole idea of essence is repeated several times in the New Testament and for us not to worship the Lord in vain or with our lips only (Matthew 15:8-9). We clearly see this in the following verses . . .
  - “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” (Matt 7:21 NIV)
  - “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” (Matt 7:12 NIV)
  - Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matt 22:37–40 NIV)

#### 12 **Essence**

- In the Apostle Paul’s epistle to the Galatians, he rebukes the church for wanting to institute certain elements of the Mosaic Law and return to the basic principles of this world where religious forms are the primary means in which to access god(s).
- Paul asks the church, how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you. (Gal 4:9–11 NIV)

#### 13 **Essence**

- To correct this misunderstanding, Paul says the following, which gets back to essence:

- For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. (Gal 5:6 NIV)
- The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Gal 5:14 NIV)

#### 14 What About Place?

- When Jesus discusses with the woman at the well on the correct place to worship God, Jesus confirms it is Jerusalem—Mount Zion.
- However, Jesus goes on to say, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. (John 4:21 NIV)
- In saying this, Jesus knows that when he dies on the cross, He will be ushering in a New Covenant, where the Spirit will no longer dwell in a building made by human hands.
- This is why, when Jesus died, the curtain separating the Holy of Holies, was torn in two, from top to bottom.

#### 15 Stephen

- Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. (Acts 6:8 NIV)
- Opposition arose, . . . men began to argue with Stephen, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke. (Acts 6:9–10 NIV)
- They produced false witnesses, who testified, “This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place (temple) and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.” (Acts 6:13–14 NIV)

#### 16 Place of God’s Presence

- “However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says: ““Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?”” (Acts 7:48–50 NIV)
- “You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!” (Acts 7:51 NIV)
- They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him . . . (Acts 7:52 NIV)

#### 17 Stephen

- When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” (Acts 7:54–56 NIV)

- At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. (Acts 7:57–58 NIV)

## 18 God's Presence

- So what is going on here is very important.
- The first Christian martyr is put to death because he implies that the activity of God's Spirit is not limited by place and that His dwelling place is not necessarily in a building made by hands.
- So then, if God's dwelling place is not in a building where is it?

## 19 God's Temple

- In the Apostle Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, he deals with a problem where the church is having difficulty dealing with the diversity of ministers sent to the body, where factions have developed and are causing division.
  - The man who plants (Paul) and the man who waters (Apollos) have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. (1 Cor 3:8–9 NIV)
  - Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you? God will destroy anyone who destroys this temple. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. (1 Cor 3:16–17 NLT-SE)
- So what Paul is saying is that the church is sacred and is not just any organization, it is now God's new dwelling place, where He lives by His Spirit.

## 20 God's Temple

- While we know that individual believers are too “a temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19), but so are we corporately.
- In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you [all together] too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. (Eph 2:21–22 NIV)
- As you come to him, the living Stone [Jesus] — rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him — you [all together] also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Pet 2:4–5 NIV)

## 21 God's Dwelling Place

- The point is God's dwelling place is now in the midst of His people.
- This is why Jesus said, “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” (Matt 18:20 NIV)

- So then, every time we come together in small groups or in a Celebration service, we are not just a gathering of people.
- Instead, we are a holy temple where God resides by His Spirit.
- Let us therefore find out what pleases so that we can offer up “clean hands and a pure heart” to God and worship the Lord not in religious forms, but in essence—keeping with the truth of God’s word.

## 22 Point to Consider

- As we take communion this evening, let us understand our true identity and function.
- We are God’s temple and the place where sacrifices are to be offered that are without fault or blemish.
- So let us not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but offer our bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God, for this is our spiritual act of worship.
- And let us treat each other with honor and respect, for we are one body, and each part is needed because no one part has all the gifts.
- We need each other, so let us, live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (Eph 4:1–3 NIV)

## 23 Conclusion

- But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Pet 2:9 NIV)
- But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.” (1 Pet 1:15–16 NIV)
- So then, let us not copy the lifestyle and pattern of the heathen around us who don’t know God or His ways.
- Instead, let us draw near to God, by imitating the essence of His character as we participate in His Body and become that place where His Spirit dwells richly.