

The Church God Is Building

Eph.1:18-22

¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

“Where are you going?” This a common question that gets asked all the time. E.g. where are you going for holidays? Where are you going after church? Where are you going for lunch? Where are you going to live? Where are you going after this job? Where are you going to send your kids to school? Where are you moving to? Where’s your relationship going? Where’s your work going? And where are you going to study?

It’s a fundamental question because it reflects the way our lives works; **we are creatures who need to know where we’re going to make sense of our lives every day.** Not knowing where you’re going will either lead to a sense of frustration because you’ll find yourself in an aimless situation, or it’ll lead to despair because you’ll find yourself stuck, going nowhere. E.g. From things that are significant or insignificant, when an outcome is uncertain, when nothing is confirmed, when people don’t get back to you, when your friends can’t decide what to do, or when your exam results are delayed – it leads to either frustration or despair.

The worst way to live life is to live it each day, each week, and each month without a clear sense of where you are going, with no clear horizon. The same holds true for the people of God; the worst way to do church, the saddest way to lead God’s people if you’re a leader, and the most tragic way to do life together as a church community **is to not be clear where we are going as a church. Most people’s view of church doesn’t go beyond the Sunday service and community group, if at all.**

And here in vv.18-22, Paul tells us where God is taking His church. It is the outcome that He is working towards, and the final result that He is securing. He says here that the glorious destiny of the church is here. If you miss it, fail to grasp it, or ignore it, then your church community will live and wander aimlessly, going nowhere.

I pray that God might give us a glimpse of the glory that He has prepared for His people the church, to grasp our place as members of the church that He is building, and to see with clarity our destiny and future as His people at GracePoint.

The church that God is building is a community where He is making a dwelling for Himself

The church that God is building is a community where He is making a dwelling for Himself. This is the glorious destiny of the church. It is what He has saved us for. You see his saving work in vv.14-16, but he doesn’t bring it to a climax in v.18: he does it in v.22. This is where God is taking His church; it is the outcome He is working towards here at GracePoint. This is the final result that He is securing. In fact, everything we do as a church community is really a preparation and a striving to be God’s dwelling place . It’s a very different way to see church. It’s not just about getting together to have a service or studying the Bible in

community groups. It's about being a place where God lives. This might just be the biggest discovery about the church for some of you.

In v.21 we are told that this house, family, or new community called the church that Jesus has saved and gathered, where He is the cornerstone, is **growing** ... **into a holy temple in the Lord**. That is the trajectory of the church, *growing into a holy temple in Jesus*.²² *In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

It is significant that Paul speaks of the church - that is God's people gathered and God's new community - as a holy temple to be a dwelling place for God. To understand what Paul means you have to understand the significance of the temple. **What is so significant about the temple?**

The Temple In The OT

In the Old Testament, the temple was absolutely central to the people of God. Why? Because the temple was the place where God lived or dwelt with His people; symbolically it was the house of God. It was also the place where God made provisions for the sin of His people so that they could live in His presence, where the sacrifices for sins were made. It's easy for us now to ignore and not see the significance of God coming to dwell in the temple. I will highlight three passages that will hopefully give you a sense of the tremendous implications of God dwelling with His people in the temple in the Old Testament, and also a fourth passage that gives us a glimpse of what it means for God to dwell in His temple.

2 Chronicles 5:14 the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.

2 Chronicles 7:1 *As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple.*² *And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD filled the LORD's house.*³ *When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the LORD on the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever."*

Psalms 63:2 *So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.*

When God fills the temple and makes the temple His dwelling place, He fills it with His glory, he fills it with His infinite greatness and worth, and He fills it with His infinite power and majesty, which makes Him unapproachable. **When God fills the temple with His glory, He is in effect filling it with His holiness.**

Isaiah 6:1 *In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.*² *Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.*³ *And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"*

Notice what Isaiah sees: he sees the Lord on a throne with His robe filling the temple and flowing out. Notice then what the seraphim are doing and what they are crying. They are covering their faces and their feet because they are in the presence of holiness; the holiness of

God marks and touches everything in the temple. They cry out: *holy, holy, holy, the whole earth is full of his glory*. You would expect them to cry out “holy holy holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of His holiness” **but they don’t**. Look carefully at what they say: **God in his holiness fills the temple**, *holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory*.

Now get this right - when God’s holiness goes out and is seen and displayed, it is called glory! The glory of God is the holiness of God on display for all to see. The glory of God is the infinite worth of God above all made known. **For that is what ‘holy’ means**. Basically ‘holy’ means “set apart” or to be “separated” from everything that is common or ordinary. **So when we say God is holy** we are speaking of His separation from everything that is common or ordinary, His setting apart as one who is incomparable in greatness and worth to everything else. To say that God is holy is to say that He is set apart above all, that there is none like Him. (The shema was a fundamental truth about God that every Jewish boy learnt. You find it in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 *hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one*, saying that there is no other God, He alone is God, there is not other! It’s another way of saying that God is holy). He is so set apart, so separated from anyone or anything that he is infinitely “one of a kind”. Who He is as God alone makes Him a being of infinite greatness and worth, that is holy.

So when God in His infinite greatness and worth above all is held up and seen, it is called glory. When God is held up as being above all, set apart, and separated from everything else, it is called glory. When the supremacy of God in all His otherness is displayed, it is called glory.

God’s glory is the radiance of His holiness; it is the radiance of His infinite greatness and worth above all. It is the shining out of His supreme value. It is this that fills the temple in the Old Testament. The reason why Isaiah says *I’m a dead man* as he beholds the glory of God is almost like you and I beholding the sun. There is nothing like the sun, nothing that compares to the sun in our solar system. It is a ball of self contained nuclear power that you cannot approach without dying. In a sense the sun is holy, separated from any other object in our solar system. What we see and feel of the sun is its radiance and its glory. It is a reflection of its holiness and separatedness. But if you look at the sun for too long you’ll go blind. Isaiah beholds the glory of God and collapses.

So in the Old Testament, the temple as God’s dwelling place is where God’s holiness dwells, where the glory of His holiness above all things in supremacy, value, and worth is displayed.

Secondly, God coming to dwell with His people in His holiness was His gift to His people in the Old Testament. It was God giving them what is set apart and separated above all things in supremacy, value, and worth. God giving them Himself in His holiness was actually the greatest gift He could give His people. For if God were to give His people anything, what could He give them of infinite value and worth above all things but Himself? I.e. His holiness in dwelling with them.

Deuteronomy 4:7 *For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?*

What makes Israel so great is that God, in His holiness, is dwelling with them; they have Him who is holy, above all things in supremacy, value, and worth.

Deuteronomy 14:2 *For you are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.*

What makes Israel a treasured possession is that God, in His holiness, is making them holy by His dwelling with them; they have Him who is holy, above all things in supremacy, value, and worth.

God dwelling with His people, in His holiness, was the gift of Himself to His people in the Old Testament. There is nothing greater to give them than that which is of infinite worth, value, and supremacy above all things in the universe.

But the problem with the people of God in the Old Testament was their sin. They didn't appreciate what they had or value God's holiness; they didn't see Him as supremely set apart above all things in value, worth, and supremacy, and they made other things holy in their lives; **that is what idolatry is**. It is trading God's holiness as a being of incomparable worth for something else that you hold to be of greater worth; it is trading God's holiness as a treasure of incomparable proportions for something else that you hold to be a greater treasure. That's what happened to Israel. They had the greatest treasure in the universe dwelling with them, which was His holiness dwelling with them, but they looked and made other things holy in their lives. They were despising, turning from, spitting on, and trampling on the holiness of God and giving glory to other things, other people and to other foreign gods.

So God left them. That's what happened. Their sin led to God leaving them in judgment; it led to God leaving His temple and abandoning His people in judgment. And in the unfounding story of the Old Testament, God's glory leaves the temple! You will read in Ezekiel 43:1-7 that the prophet Ezekiel, as he lives among an exiled people without a temple, looks forward to an ideal temple. He is anticipating the future of the people of God. In his vision he sees a perfect temple in the midst of a perfect city, where the temple is filled with the glory of God, where God dwells among His people forever, where sin no longer separates them from Him, and where judgment no longer hangs over them! Ezekiel's vision focuses on the presence of God, and even the name of the city reflects that focus, 'the Lord is there!' That is the future that the Bible anticipates, a perfect city and temple where God is dwelling in the midst of a holy people.

Paul is saying in this passage (Ephesians 1:18-22) this has happened and is happening in Jesus. A temple is being built right here. You guys are that temple joined together in Jesus; in Jesus your sin no longer separates you from God, in Jesus judgment no longer hangs over you, in Jesus you are reconciled in Him and are cleansed, and in Jesus you are being brought together and built into a holy temple where God now dwells in your community by His Spirit! **It has happened and is happening right now!**

The temple here is not built by human hands; human hands are sinful and temples built by human hands are destroyed. The temple here is a building of people that He makes His dwelling place, to be filled with His glory forever.

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Edited by Amy Cheng

In the Old Testament temple, God's glory fills the temple. He makes the temple His dwelling place but He is unapproachable because sin cuts His people off from Him; they see His glory but they cannot approach it.

In the New Testament temple, God's glory fills His people in Jesus. We are made His dwelling place, and He shares His unveiled glory with us to His praise and our joy forever.

What's happening here is that God is bringing our salvation to a climax. God coming to dwell with us in His holiness is His gift to us, to His praise and our joy forever.

Reconciliation climaxes in us by not just having access to God (v.18), but also in us becoming the dwelling place for God (v.22). It is because the ultimate experience of reconciliation or peace is not when we can communicate with each other without hostility, or even when we can share a meal together. It is when we can live together. The ultimate experience of peace is when people are able to live together in the same home.

Here God comes and dwells with us and lives with us; in doing so, He is actually giving us the greatest gift He can give us. He is giving us Himself in His holiness in worth, value, and supremacy over all things. In doing so He is bringing us to the greatest joy He can give us because He brings us to a place where we are in the most intimate fellowship with God Himself, the one who is holy and above all, the one who is infinite in greatness and worth, and set apart over everything of value. We are now living together where God is living with us, dwelling with us, sharing who He is with us, and filling us with His glory. Paul is reminding us that every hostility between us and God has been removed so that God himself can now live with us to His praise and our joy.

Consider with me for a moment - you have your rock stars, celebrities, and people whom you consider great. Eg. Fiona and her love of Jack Johnson, you and your favourite movie star or celebrity or musician. The fact that we have rock stars, celebrities, and people in our lives that we esteem and hold up is a reflection of their 'holiness' to us. In a sense they are holy because they are a cut above other people, set apart above them and from them. Fiona is holy to Zac because in his eyes, she is a cut above and incomparable to other girls in his life. What could give you more joy and delight than one of your rock stars or celebrities coming and living with you, or becoming your personal friend? Or for Zac what could give him more joy and delight than knowing Fiona, or speaking to her. The closer they are the greater his delight. The closer you are to that which you consider holy in your life, the greater your joy or delight will be. **The same is happening here** because what could give you more joy and delight than God, who is holy and incomparably a cut above every treasure in His infinite greatness, worth, and perfection, coming and living with you? The closer He is to us, the greater our joy and delight will be.

Paul says that it is in Jesus that God has made us His dwelling place, which is to His praise and our joy. **God coming to dwell with us is the climax of the gospel.** I am brought to praise Him forever in His holiness above all, and I get joy forever in praising the one who is holy, infinite in worth, value, and supremacy above all. We are given God in His holiness, in His infinite worth, value, and supremacy above all to His praise and our joy forevermore.

That is the glorious destiny of the church, where God is moving us, preparing us to be a dwelling place where He now lives (1 Corinthians 6), and where He will continue to live with us and us with Him forever, to His praise and our joy. (Revelation 4-5; 21-22)

This is the trajectory of the church, moving towards and growing into a dwelling place for God, a place where His glory is supremely seen, experienced, and unhindered by our sin, where we are exalting and praising his holiness above all things, to his praise and our joy forever. And this is the reason why when you get to the book of Revelation you'll see that the final word and scene is of God dwelling with His people praising his holiness and delighting in singing those praises forever. In Revelation 4-5, God's people are beholding the glory of God, and the living creatures sing Isaiah's song – *Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God almighty*. God's people are living in His presence, praising Him and singing the praise of Jesus and the Father.

Notice how their praise for Him springs out of them beholding His holiness as God. They do this as they see Him set apart in His infinite greatness above all, and as they see Him in His separatedness as a treasure that is incomparable. The more something is a treasure in your life, the more it will be holy above all things, and the greater the object of our praise is above everything else, the greater our joy and delight will be.

Praise is the outpouring of my joy in that which I consider holy, and that which I consider supreme and a cut above the rest. We praise what is holy all the time in life. E.g. my child whom I consider holy, set apart, and a cut above the rest, or my work that I consider holy, set apart, and more important than what other people are doing. We praise what is holy all the time; praise is the outpouring of our joy in the things that we consider holy.

In coming to dwell with us, God in His holiness is giving us what is infinitely set apart above all in value, worth, and supremacy, which is Himself. Therefore God in making us His dwelling place, and in securing our praise of Him in His holiness over everything, is actually bringing us to the greatest delight we can possibly experience. In making you His dwelling place, God is giving you the greatest gift He can give you, which is His holiness as the incomparable treasure in the universe, to His praise and your joy.

That's the whole point of the goal of the gospel in Ephesians ch.1; it's all to the praise of His glory and grace, that is what is happening here. God is saving you, me, and us; then he comes and dwell with us, **that is God saving us to His glory and grace** because He is making Himself our supreme treasure by coming to dwell with us. He is bringing us to Himself as the supreme object of our praise, the one in His holiness whom there is no equal in perfection and majesty comes and dwells with us, and secures our praise forever. However in doing so He is also bringing us to the greatest joy He can give us. **This is because by dwelling with us, He is giving us Himself in unhindered and unveiled fellowship as the greatest treasure in the universe, in whom is every perfection because He is holy.**

That is our destiny. God is now dwelling with His people to His praise, their delight, and joy. That is our destiny, being brought into infinite joy in fellowship with God in all His glory, infinite greatness, and worth.

Some of you have this view that praising God into eternity is the most boring thing you could do into eternity. If that's you then you haven't grasped who God is in His holiness, as a being who is infinitely set apart and separated in worth, value, and greatness above all things in the

universe. If you think praising Jesus into eternity is going to be boring then you haven't grasped who God is in His holiness as a being who is infinitely set apart and separated as an incomparable treasure above all things in the universe.

It's like comparing Him with what you find worthy of praise in your life right now; it's like comparing a rock to a diamond. Into eternity who else would you praise as holy and a cut above all things in the universe? What else could you praise as infinitely supreme over all? Who else would you want to treasure above all into eternity? What else would you like to spend eternity praising? Would it be your golf, material possessions, degree, career, husband, or wife? Who would you like on the throne who is worthy of praise? Who would you like to live with forever who is worthy of infinite praise over everything?

It's not that we don't understand God's holiness; it's just that we consider other things in our lives to be more holy than God. We are too easily satisfied with what we think is holy. We consider things and people in our lives to be a cut above God, so when the affection of my heart beholds things here as supreme over God they become the objects of my praise and joy instead of God. We exchange the holiness of God for the holiness of things or people; we prefer the holiness of things in our lives to the holiness of God, and so if He is not my desire now, then it's no surprise that He won't be my desire as I look into the future. And if I don't desire him now, then it's no surprise I will not desire him into eternity. And maybe, just maybe if I don't desire him now, then it's no surprise that it will not be my eternity.

But if God is a holy being who is set apart with no equal, separated in His infinite greatness and worth, supreme over all in majesty and power, the incomparable treasure in the universe in whom is every perfection, and eternally a cut above everything of value, then to compare Him to what you think will be praiseworthy in your life now with Him is not just banal but foolishly sinful.

This is the destiny of the church. The church that God is building is a community where He is making a dwelling for Himself in His holiness, where He is living with His people, displaying His glory unhindered, and sharing His glory with them to His praise and their joy forevermore.

The implications are tremendous and many for us to be a people where God dwells, where we are made holy by His very presence as a holy God, and where His glory is now present as well. I will unpack one critical thing next week **but let me very briefly suggest to you this week that one of the implications of God dwelling with us in His holiness and glory means that as a community, the holiness of God in His glory must touch everything; everything that we do as a community needs to be working towards reflecting His holiness and glory in all that we do.** We need to be holding out and displaying His infinite and incomparable worth above all things.

Everywhere that people look - relationships, ministry, things we produce, and community groups - should all be places where God dwells; they should be places where His holiness overflows into radiant glory to be seen by others. Do people see us preserving, upholding, and magnifying God's supreme greatness and worth above all things in what we do at GracePoint? Is God's incomparable value as a treasure in the universe evident in what we do in or relationships? Is God's infinite worth visibly set apart in our community groups? Because where God dwells is where His holiness is present, and where His glory shines.

Finding a dwelling place, a place to own and live, is a basic human pursuit. It is what we all do. That's what a nation is; we are people who have a dwelling place with boundaries or borders. The purpose of a border is to say that this is our land, our dwelling place. That's what a city is, a dwelling place for a group of people from Sydney or New York City. That's what a home is, a place you own and live in. A basic human desire is to find a dwelling place to own and live in; it's what most people in society and culture work for, seek, fight over, and save for - a dwelling place.

What's the normal pattern when you find a dwelling place, when you're looking for a place to own, live in, or even your own room if you don't own a home? You look for something suitable. Everyone has a criteria when they look for a place to dwell, live in, or own. We look at the condition of the dwelling place, its wear and tear, how kept or unkept it is, the kind of renovation that needs to happen, and what it does or doesn't have. Why do we do that? It is because according to our lifestyle, where we choose to dwell is a reflection of our worth, value, likes and dislikes, and preferences; where we choose to dwell is a reflection of who we are. It's the reason why people renovate their homes, their dwelling place. It's the reason why people choose homes that they like. No one goes to buy, own, and live in a home that they don't like. If they don't like it then they change it to suit their liking. It's the reason why people decorate and personalize their rooms. For all you young people living at home, that's your dwelling place. You put things on the wall, and all around you you fill your room with the things that are precious and important to you. E.g. Ashleigh's pony and Joshua's *Star Wars* lego collection.

What happens when you buy a dwelling place, when you move into a place that you've bought? You clear it out and clean it. You change things to reflect who you are, such as your likes and dislikes, the colour of the wall, and paintings. You put up things that are precious and important to you, e.g. photos of your children. You fill it with things that you consider great in your life. That is why we buy what we buy to have in our homes, in our dwelling places. You fill it with what is of worth and value to you, what is holy to you above all other things that you could have put up. You fill it with things that reflect your glory, and you fill it with that which you consider great and of infinite greatness, value, and worth.

So when people come and visit your home, your dwelling place, they'll begin to see in your dwelling place who you are. People will see what you consider glorious in your life, what you consider great of worth and value, what you find precious, what you find valuable, and what you like and dislike. E.g. the sound room, play room, or a huge kitchen. **So it's no surprise that when God dwells in His people, and makes His home among them**, He fills it with what He supremely likes, ensures that His home is untainted by anything He dislikes, fills it with that which He holds to be more precious and important to Him, and fills it with that which He considers of infinite greatness and worth. **He fills it with His holiness and His infinite greatness and worth above all things, which is Himself as the incomparable treasure above all things. He has to because He is God.** What can He fill His dwelling place with other than Himself, His holiness, and His glory? God cannot do any less without failing to be God.

That tells me that everything in the church, ministry, and relationships; from this bulletin I'm holding, to our conversations, to our community groups, to all the training we do, and all our dinners together, in everything we are to radiate His holiness and Him above all things, to radiate nothing less than His glory. Every picture radiates His greatness and worth, and every item speaks of His holiness; that's the point of the articles of the temple. The objects in the

temple in the Old Testament were treated a certain way to reflect the holiness of God because they were all to Him and His holiness above all. Every activity is to magnify Him, every heart to be captured by Him, every eye to be drawn to Him, every service for His glory, and every relationship to point to Him. As we do that we are being built up into a dwelling place for God, by His Spirit, to His praise and our joy forever, now and in the final gathering to come.

Community Group Discussion/Application Questions

1) Read 1 Peter 2; Isaiah 6:1-6; Consider the constant call to holiness in the NT (1 Pet.1:15). The passage we've looked at tells us why we are to be a holy people. Holiness is God's gift to us in dwelling with us. So how does the holiness of God as an incomparable cut above everything else in worth, value, greatness in our presence/midst every time we gather as a church shape the way we approach church and our life together? How do we as a community seeking to do life together grow to be God's dwelling place - a place where the glory of his holiness dwells (to his praise and our joy)? How do we so preserve and magnify the glory of God's holiness (his worth above all things) when we meet, in our relationships, serving, thinking etc to his praise and our joy?

2) If we are now the dwelling place of God, where the glory of his holiness dwells by the Holy Spirit, and we are growing towards becoming the dwelling place of God in the future with all God's people (Rev.4-5): how does knowing what is to come shape my thinking about church, community, doing life together? How does this help me esteem and value the church God has saved me into? How does it shape the way I think of my part in reflecting the glory of God's holiness to build a church that befits the dwelling place of God?