

The Glorious Temples of God

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This morning's readings are brimming with commentary on the glory of God made known in temples and how God's glory does not always appear in ways that humanity might expect.

1 Kings 8.22–30,
41–43

We begin with King Solomon, the second son of David and Bathsheba, who has inherited the throne and is dedicating the temple in Jerusalem. This is the first of the two temples that will be built in Jerusalem. Solomon's temple will be destroyed in 586 BC and the second temple will be built when the people of Israel return from their exile in Babylon and will stand until it is destroyed by Rome in 70 AD.

The temple is the centre of Israelite religion and, by extension, much of society. It is tied closely to the monarchy—Solomon's palace is next door—and the rest of government. Visitors come from far and wide to pray or simply to see the spectacle of the place. It is a feat of ancient art and architecture. This importance is part of why Solomon's prayer of dedication is one of the longest prayers in the Hebrew Bible. Solomon asks that God's eyes be open on the temple day and night and that God hear the prayers of those who visit this place. Solomon goes on to specify that the prayers of Israel and of foreigners who come to the temple should also be heard by God and that their requests should be granted so that all the world might see and know God glory. God may live in Jerusalem, but the whole world is welcome in the courts of God's temple.

The temple may be safe for all of humanity, but for animals suitable for sacrifice to God, the temple is a dangerous place to be. Of course, the routine of sacrifices is critical to the relationship between Israel and God. The manner of sacrifice is also important. This is one of the functions of the temple priests who work at the altars. They must know the appropriate ways to kill and butcher the animals offered, how to collect the blood, and how to distribute the blood and parts on the altars. This is all important to the maintenance of the relationship with God.

Luke 2.24

Lev. 1.15

As we hear when Jesus is presented in the temple, if you are too poor to offer a calf or a ram as a thanksgiving sacrifice, you may instead offer two turtledoves. Birds are too small to butcher and have their blood collected, but the blood must make it to the altar. So, when birds were sacrificed, they were made to bleed out against the side of the altar, making sure that their blood went where it needed to go.

Psalms 84

The psalmist is reflecting on the glory of intimate, close relationship with God, such as one might find in the temple. Among the many astonishing things that God does in this psalm is to turn the temple from a place of sacrifice into a place where even swallows and sparrows are safe to build nests and lay their young at the side of God's altar. The glory of God, at least in this psalmist's imagination, is best expressed in a defence and preservation of life, even in what was once a place of sacrifice.

John 6.56–69

The conversation between Jesus and the disciples in this portion of the sixth chapter of John is interesting in light of what we have just heard about the temple and the desire for all people to have an intimate relationship with God. Jesus has been teaching for some time on what the closeness of this relationship entails and here, some of

John 6.60

the gathered crowd push back. "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?"

Jesus replies by underscoring that his teaching is the truth and that he knows, in spite of all they have seen and heard, some still do not believe. When those disciples leave the following, Jesus does not curse them or implore them to return. They have heard what is on offer and what is at stake. There is nothing but free will, here. The disciples who leave and those who stay have both made choices entirely on their own, knowing the opportunity, the cost, and the consequences.

John 1.14; 2.21

It is interesting to think of this moment in relation to Solomon's prayer of dedication. Solomon prays that the temple will be open to all people and that every prayer offered in it will be heard and attended to by God. Solomon prays that the glory of God, that intimate relationship, will be open to all. Jesus, who John describes as the dwelling place and temple of God, has drawn many people to himself. He has shown the glory of God in miracles and prophecy. He has explained the depth of closeness that God desires with humanity in terms of sacrifice and sharing his own body and blood as food for those who believe. And when they hear it, many disciples find it a hard teaching, they grumble, and choose to leave.

Proverbs
20.12-13

The temples of God are meant to be open, safe, welcoming places for all, even little nesting sparrows. But God will not force anyone to enter or to stay. The hearing ear and the seeing eye are gifts from God but not everyone is ready to receive the glory of God in the same way or at the same time. We should give thanks constantly that our God is gracious, merciful, and patient, willing to wait for us, even when we choose to walk away.

1 Cor. 3.16

When we think, today, of the glory of God and where it might be found, great works of art, beautiful spaces, and the altars of our churches may be what spring to mind. These are wonderful and, for many, effective places to meet God and experience divine glory. But God's temples are no longer only buildings. John describes Jesus as the very temple and Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, reminds them that "We are also temples of God, for the Holy Spirit dwells within us."

Ephesians
6.10-20

Imagine what it means for each of us to be the sign of God's glory that Solomon prays for. The sharing of God's presence and the work of prayer is now, somehow, a process that you and I participate in through the presence of the Holy Spirit. The beauty and the wonder and the awe of Solomon's temple are now, somehow, in us. To quote Anthony Oliveira's book, *Dayspring*, "Nothing is housed in churches and temples and holy places that is not housed in you."¹ We carry with us a reflection of God's glory and we are meant to share it with the world.

As Paul exhorts the Ephesians in today's passage to take up the symbols of Roman aggression and make them tools which serve the gospel of peace, so you and I are charged to be signs of openness, peace, safety, and love in the world. We may not be living in territory occupied by the Roman military, but we and our neighbours labour under the oppressions of our own time. God's plan is for the liberation of all people from oppression. A place where righteousness, truth, and faith swords and armour. The salvation of God is open to everyone, even those who find it too difficult and grumble and walk away for a while. The salvation of God leads us to a kingdom where no part of creation is shaded from the light of God's glory, not even the smallest nesting sparrow. This is the kingdom you and I have been called to proclaim in word and deed. These are the temples we have been made to be. This is the glory of God we can show forth in the world.

¹Anthony Oliveira, *Dayspring* (Toronto: Strange Light, 2024).