

Heaven: God's Dream Home

Turn to Rev 21. This is the third Sunday of Advent, and our theme this year is, "why did Christ come?" On the first Sunday of Advent, we talked about death, he came because of death. On the second Sunday we talked about judgement. The third and fourth Sundays will be about heaven, which for sure is a more enjoyable message.

But heaven would not happen if Christ did not first deal with death and judgement. We'll begin with two verses from Rev 21, and then we'll go back to Genesis and take a quick tour through the Bible.

People sometimes imagine their dream home. If you had a dream home, where would it be? What would it be like? David S. builds custom homes, and for some of those people he's building a dream home for them. They pick the land, they pick the house plan, and so on.

Think about God imagining his dream home. We are watching God, and he is day-dreaming about his perfect home. What's going on in his mind? When God thinks about his favorite place, what's he thinking about? Where would God like to live forever?

We sometimes wonder what heaven will be like. Heaven will be like this, or like that. So, picture God imagining heaven. When God thinks about heaven, what's he thinking about? What kind of place is God imagining? What is God looking forward to?

Turn to Rev 21:2-3. The Bible tells us what God imagines his dream home to be like.
I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! (behold! Pay attention!) God's dwelling place is now with the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."

God's Dream Home is His People

The word "with" occurs three times in one sentence: *Look! God's dwelling place is now **with the people**, and he will **dwell with them**. They will be his people, and **God himself will be with them and be their God**.*

God's dwelling place is with us, he will dwell with us, he himself will be with us. God's dream home is his people, living with his people, being in the middle of his people. When God imagines heaven, he imagines living with his people, we're all around him and he's all around us. That's God's dream home, that's God's picture of heaven.

And we think: “Really? That’s it? How can that be? What’s so special about us?” What’s special about us is that God made us to be his dream home, and then he lost his home, and he’s been rebuilding it a long time, and what we call “heaven” is God moving into his dream home.

The Garden of Eden

God made Adam and Eve and put them in the garden of Eden. We read in Genesis 3 that it was God’s habit to come into the garden every day to be with Adam and Eve. The garden of Eden was for people, and God was with the people. The garden was *their* home, but it was also *God’s* home, because he was with them there.

When Adam and Eve sinned, when the human race rebelled against God, God put them out of the garden of Eden. When that happened, it was like God’s home burned down. He was in a home that he’d built for himself, it was very good, and in one day it self-destructed. He lost it.

And there was pain. For women, children would bring pain. For men, work would bring pain. That’s in Genesis 3. We read about God’s pain in Genesis 6, the beginning of the flood story. *“The Lord saw how great humanity’s wickedness had become. The Lord was grieved that he had made people on the earth, and God’s heart was filled with pain.”* Everyone got pain.

The Tabernacle – Exodus 25:8

When people lose everything in a disaster, they start to rebuild. We do that because God made us in his image and likeness. God began to rebuild his home. That is, God began to call people who were not rebels, but who would trust him and serve him. Covenant people. Turn to Exodus 25. The rebuilding started when God called Abraham, but we’ll skip to Exodus 25.

By Exodus 24, God had brought the Israelites out of their slavery in Egypt, across the Red Sea, and to his mountain, Mt Sinai. In Exodus 24, God and Israel made a covenant with each other. He would be their God, and they would be his people. That’s Exodus 24.

Now let’s read 25:8 – *Have the Israelites make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.* As soon as God had a covenant people, he made plans to move in. God wants covenant people, so he can move in, so that he can live with them. We’re down here, he’s in heaven. God does not prefer that. As soon as they agreed to be his people, God made plans to dwell among them.

Now to Exodus 40, the last paragraph of Exodus: 40:33-35 - *Then Moses set up the courtyard around the tabernacle and altar and put up the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard. And so Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.*

As soon as Moses finished, God moved in. This is the first time God has lived with his people since Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden of Eden. The tabernacle is a substitute garden of Eden. God banished them from Eden, then started making a way to move in again.

It's all God's doing. God rescued them from Egypt, brought them to Mt Sinai, then God made a covenant to Israel, then immediately God made plans to move back in. Like marriage. And as soon as the work on the tabernacle was finished, God moved in.

Eden, the Tabernacle, the Temple, and the Holy New Jerusalem

Now I want to point out a few details of how the tabernacle and its furniture were made, to show how it connects to Eden, and connects to the holy city in Revelation 21-22.

Cherubim – Cherubim are angels with wings. Usually in the Bible angels do not have wings, but cherubim do. When Adam and Eve were put out of the garden, cherubim guarded the entrance.

In the tabernacle Moses built, the ark of the covenant had two gold cherubim on it, and the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the tabernacle had cherubim woven into it. They were like guards to God's dwelling. Eden had them, and the tabernacle had them. (The four living creatures in Revelation, six wings each, are cherubim.)

Table for Bread - There was a gold table in the tabernacle that always had fresh bread on it, and wine. That's what gardens produce, like the garden of Eden. There is food in God's presence, bread and wine. In the new Eden, the tree of life has twelve kinds of fruit, one each month.

Lampstand – there was a gold lampstand in the tabernacle, which we call a “menorah.” It had a main stem and six branches, three on each side, seven lamps in all. These lamps burned oil, and the priests kept those lamps going day and night. In Genesis 1, light was the first thing God made, and in God's presence there is always light. The holy city is like that, too, much light.

And the curious thing about this lampstand (Exodus 26:31f), is that the gold is shaped to be full of flowers, buds, and blossoms. The main trunk and each of the six branches are full of elaborate golden flowers, golden buds and blossoms, patterned after an almond tree. The lampstand is shaped like a fruit tree that is bursting with life in spring.

Does this remind you of a the garden of Eden? Yes, the tree of life. The tabernacle has a golden replica of the tree of life, because the tabernacle is God's dwelling, and life comes from God.

Gold – all the furniture in the tabernacle was gold, either solid gold, or a gold layer over wood. Gold is the metal of God's dwelling. In the new Jerusalem, the holy city, the city itself is made of pure gold, and the great street of the city was made of gold.

This gold is mostly not about wealth, or luxury, it is the metal of God's presence, it means the whole new Jerusalem is the holy dwelling of God. And remember that the holy city is not an actual city, it is the bride of the Lamb, that is, the city is simply that great crowd of believers praising God, the holy dwelling of God. The gold means the dwelling place of God.

The Holy of Holies is a Cube - The Holy of Holies, the Most Holy Place, at one end of the tabernacle, was actually a cube. It was ten cubits long and wide and high, that is, about 15 feet long and wide and high. When Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem, he modeled it after the tabernacle, only bigger.

1 Kings 6:20 *The inner sanctuary [of the temple] was twenty cubits long, twenty wide, and twenty high. Solomon overlaid the inside with pure gold.*

The new Jerusalem is also pictured as a cube, a huge cube, 12,000 stadia long and wide and high. The point is that the entire holy city is the Holy of Holies, the dwelling of God. We, the people of God, will be God's new Holy of Holies, we ourselves will be God's new Most Holy Place.

Garden Ornaments in Solomon's Temple – since we've mentioned Solomon's temple, notice how he decorated it. Solomon decorated the temple to look like a garden, to remind Israel of the garden of Eden, when God and people lived together. In the garden, God and people were together. So also, in the temple God and people were meeting together in the same place.

The walls all around the temple, inner and outer rooms, had cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers carved into them (1K6:29). There were two huge wooden doors leading into the Holy of Holies: cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers were also carved into them.

The temple had two huge bronze pillars at the front. The tops of the pillars were decorated with pomegranates and lilies. He also made a huge bronze basin to hold water, and its rim was like a big lily blossom. The temple in a limited way re-created the garden of Eden, as the tabernacle had done. God was in the process of rebuilding his home, that is, moving back in with his people.

Twelve Tribes Around God's Tent - Israel camped around the tabernacle. Numbers 2 names all twelve tribes of Israel, and how they were to camp when they stopped for a while. The tabernacle was in the middle and Num 2 names three tribes to camp south of the tabernacle, another three on the north side, three on the west, and the last three on the east side. Tabernacle in the middle.

That's a picture of where God wants to be, in the middle of his people. When the Israelites traveled, six tribes would walk, one after the other, then the priests and Levites would carry the tabernacle and all its furniture, and then the other six tribes would come behind. God was in the middle of his people. That's where he wants to be!

So God is living in the middle of his people, but it is all partial, it is incomplete, it is still preliminary. Ordinary Israelites can never go into the tabernacle, only priests can do that, and they have to be careful. So God in the tabernacle is in the middle of his people, but it is still only a start, it is not the real thing yet.

But the new Jerusalem, the holy city, has twelve gates, three in each direction, north and south and east and west, one for each of the twelve tribes, and these gates never ever close. It is a picture of our complete freedom to be in the Presence of God, and his complete freedom to be all his glorious self with us. We will even see his face (Rv22:4).

New Testament - Emmanuel, God With Us

In Matthew 1, the first chapter of the NT, we read that Jesus fulfills a prophecy of Isaiah, and he will be called Emmanuel, which in Hebrew means "God with us." God was present in the tabernacle Moses built, and in Solomon's temple, but when Jesus was born, God was turning up the intensity. Instead of being in a special room in a special building, he was going to walk around with us and be among us. It was a big step forward in God's plan.

God's People Themselves become the Temple

In the NT, because Christ has come, we the people of God become the temple. In the OT, God's presence was in a structure, either the tabernacle, which was an elaborate tent, or the temple that Solomon built. But in the NT, there is no structure any more, God has made a progress in building his home, now the people themselves are the temple.

In the OT, God had his special building in the midst of the people. In the NT, because of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the people themselves are the temple.

Once individual believers are the temple, but usually the gathering, the community of God's people, are the temple. 1 Cor 3:16-17. *Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.*

People, if this was true of the church in Corinth, it is true of the Kleefeld Christian Community. God is saying this to US, here, now. *Don't you know that you yourselves [at KCC] are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? God's temple is sacred, and you together [in the Kleefeld Christian Community] are that temple.*

We might not take this seriously, they were not in Corinth, but God certainly takes this seriously. Paul writes about this also in Ephesians 2:21-22, and Hebrews 3 says that we are God's house, and Peter says we are living stones being built into a spiritual house (1Pt2).

This is still Partial and Incomplete

But all of this is still partial, preliminary, incomplete. We are still apart from God. Even though God is with us, we still know that the other dwelling of God is in heaven, like the throne room vision that John saw in Rev 4-5, or what Paul saw when he was taken up to paradise. To be present from the body is to be absent from the Lord.

Jesus told parables about a landowner or king who left his servants, and went on a long journey, and then came back. Right now we are the servants whose king has gone on a long journey. We are still apart from God, and God is from us. He doesn't like it, and neither do we.

God's Dream Home Completed

I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now with the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."

From then on, no separation, no throne of God somewhere else. You and I and whole great crowd will be his dream house, and we will see his face. We have no idea how much we will enjoy that, to be so close to God. But that's for next Sunday. Today the point is how much God will enjoy that. He will finally have the home he always wanted. Amen.

PRAYER: Oh God, we are surprised that you so steadily want to be with us. There is surely something here about you we do not understand. We have never understood your love very well. We love you and trust you, and we want to live in your ways. But also see our weakness and failure, and we can hardly believe that a whole lot of people pretty much like us would be your ideal home. But you have spoken, and we go with that. We are honoured, and so pleased to be part of your new dwelling. Complete in us the work you have begun, and bring us joyfully into your presence. We will praise you forever. May your holy name be honoured, and may your will be done. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace as we trust in him, so that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.