

“Where Does God Dwell?”—1 Kings 8:27-30

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Where Does God Dwell?”, is 1 Kings 8:27-30 → *Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You; how much less this house that I have built! Yet have regard to the prayer of Your servant and to his plea, O LORD my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that Your servant prays before You this day, that Your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which You have said, “My name shall be there,” that You may listen to the prayer that Your servant offers toward this place. . . . listen in heaven Your dwelling place, and when You hear, forgive.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Why is it when many people look for God they go to a church building? Why do so many people get “dressed up” to go to church? Why is it that many a child in the church building has been scolded with words like, “We don’t talk like that in church!” or “Stop running in the church!”? Why do so many people refer to the church building as the “house of God?” Why is it that behavior which is considered appropriate in one activity or place is considered inappropriate in the church building? To many the answer is obvious: You act

respectfully in the presence of God.

The presence of God dwells in this building? How? While some might look at the furnishings and “atmosphere” of the sanctuary filling one with awe in God’s presence others might focus on the presence of Christ connected with the Lord’s Supper. (For instance, genuflecting—that is, kneeling down before sitting in your pew—in the Roman Catholic tradition was based upon coming into the presence of Jesus which they consider the leftover bread from Communion stored in a cabinet on the altar.) Others may think of God’s presence here because this building was dedicated to Him for His work. Still others might think of His presence by His Holy Spirit in the hearts and lives of those who gather for worship in this place.

Solomon’s father, King David, had come up with the idea of building the temple. The LORD told him: *Your son who shall be born to you shall build the house for My name.* (cf. 1 Kings 8:19) Solomon was the man. Upon completion of the building of the temple Solomon offered up a prayer of dedication based upon Yahweh’s faithfulness in keeping His promises. In verse 27 of our text he contemplates: *Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You; how much less this house that I have built!* He recognized that God cannot be contained in heaven or on earth and certainly not in some physical structure built by people.

Yet, King Solomon does refer to God's *dwelling place* as being *in heaven* (verse 30) while recognizing His presence in their midst. This is because God's presence is where He chooses to dwell! Even though we cannot contain God He can choose to dwell in the stuff of earth. He had displayed His presence in the temple when the ark of the covenant was placed into it by a cloud. (cf. 1 Kings 8:10-11) **God chooses** to reveal His presence and His glory. We do not try to contain His presence somehow.

Actually, this is the essence of idolatry. Idolatry seeks to contain God in some fashion, whether it be in the form of a statue, a structure, a tradition or an experience. Of course, when we start to contain or "compartmentalize" God to a physical structure or place it reveals our sinful desires to control Him. Soon it can become a religion of our own making rather than a relationship of God's making. Remember, God's chooses when and where He dwells and by faith we submit to His presence where He gives us His grace and forgiveness of sins. Even Solomon's prayer of dedication is an act of submission to Yahweh's presence, not an act of manipulation.

In a discussion with a woman as to the proper place to worship Yahweh Jesus said in John 4:24 → *God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.* He took the focus off of a compartmentalized worship of God and placed it on how He is worshiped—*in spirit and truth.* It's

not about the location but about the faith expressed toward God's presence. Throughout his prayer Solomon recognized this by referring to people praying from their different locations toward this place where God chose to make His name dwell.

God's presence in the temple in Jerusalem really looked forward to His dwelling amongst us in the Person & Work of Jesus. Colossians 2:9 says: In Christ *the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily*. God took on human flesh in Jesus in order to make Solomon's prayer a reality for all people. Notice his prayer in verses 29-30 asks God to *listen to the prayer that Your servant offers toward this place. . . and when You hear, **forgive***. He states this over and over again throughout the prayer. Our primary desire in the presence of God is to receive and bask in His forgiveness of our sins in the place where He says His presence dwells—proclamation of His Word and the distribution of His sacraments! We come in humility to be forgiven of our sins through faith in Jesus' perfect life, death and resurrection!

When we fall into the sin of containing Yahweh to a physical structure, He tells us: *Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool; what is the house that you would build for Me, and what is the place of My rest? All these things My hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit*

*and trembles at My word.* (cf. Isaiah 66:1-2) The reverence and respect in this building is an act of submission in His presence through His Word in worship.

God's presence in the temple in Jerusalem also looked forward to the indwelling of His Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives. Because of the Holy Spirit's work we, as the gathered believers around God's presence in Word and sacraments, are the temple of God. Ephesians 2:18-22 says the through Jesus we *have access **in one Spirit** to the Father* and that we are *members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in Whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him you also are being built together **into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*** God chooses to dwell in you, both individually and collectively, by His Holy Spirit working through the Word and sacraments.

Thus, God presence is here in His people gathered in His name and not simply because the building is called a church. The church gathers in this building where a lot of "remodeling" takes place every time we gather around God's Word and His sacraments.

This also means that God is present in the world each day as we function in the daily vocations, activities and relationships of our lives because of whose we are in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit wants us to act and talk with the

same reverence and respect for God in our daily lives as we do in our corporate worship. Why? So that our claiming the name of Jesus becomes proclaiming of the name of Jesus so others can repent, believe in Jesus and become “living stones” in this “building” as well. This is how we grow *into a holy temple in the Lord!* Solomon reflected this understanding in his prayer when he said: *Hear in heaven Your dwelling place . . . in order that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You.*

The Holy Spirit expands this picture of the believer in Jesus as God’s “building” in 1 Peter 2:4-5 → *As you come to Jesus, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* Notice it simply a matter of being the church—those who live by faith in Christ Jesus by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit—as you serve your neighbor where you are at any given moment. Wherever His church is, there God dwells.

Where does God dwell? Through faith in Christ He dwells in our hearts, in our lives, in our struggles, in our joys, in our experiences and in our worship. It His dwelling in us by His Holy Spirit which moves us to glorify Him, both corporately as we gather for worship and personally as live for Him everyday. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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