

God's Dwelling Place, Ephesians 2:19-22

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April 5, 2020

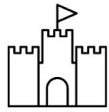
Introduction

Good morning, my name is Brad and I'm one of the pastors. Today we are carrying on with our sermon series in the letter of Ephesians, which we have subtitled, "Into the Fullness of Christ". Today is one of those passages where we'll really begin to see what is meant by that phrase, "the fullness of Christ". I think it will also help us to know how it applies to our identity as family and to our current season amidst a pandemic.

So I invite you to turn in your Bibles with me to Ephesians 2:19-22. The title of today's sermon is "God's Dwelling Place". And the main idea that will rise to the surface from today's passage is simply this: You (plural) are God's dwelling place. Since Paul gets really visual in his writing today, I want to be really visual in how we break down the passage, like this:

- 1) 3 things God's dwelling place is: kingdom, temple, household¹
- 2) 3 things God's dwelling place has: foundation, cornerstone, stones²

3 Things God's Dwelling Place Is



Kingdom

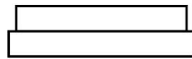


Temple

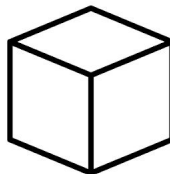


Household

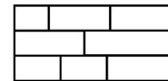
3 Things God's Dwelling Place Has



Foundation



Cornerstone



Stones

¹ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), Loc 4365

² R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), Loc 1606

With that said, if you are able, please stand with me to honor the reading of God's word. Again, today's passage is Ephesians 2:19-22. Church, hear the word of the Lord:

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. Ephesians 2:19-22

The Lord has spoken to us. [Congregation:] Thanks be to God! You may be seated.

Exposition

Anybody remember the early 2000s tv show MTV Cribs? Well if you missed it, the gist of it was like this: from the comfort of your couch you can get all-access, in-person tours of celebrity mansions. How cool is that! (Except for the part at the end where they kicked you out and slammed the door in your face.) You can't tell me it's not at least a little bit entertaining to see how many cars people drive and what their bathroom looks like. But here's what really made the show: you got a deeply personal glimpse into the life of a celebrity. If it was just some random rich person, we probably wouldn't care as much. But take someone we're familiar with, perhaps even a fan of, and we find ourselves fascinated by their *dwelling place*.

It makes sense then as people familiar with God, we would want a glimpse into *his* dwelling place. We know the old stereotypes, that in God's house there are many rooms, and the streets are paved with gold, and the entrance has pearly gates. But is that all the Bible has to say about God's house? Surely it's gotta be better than any celebrity crib ever dreamed up!

Well it is—but not in the way we might think. In today's passage Paul is going to describe God's dwelling place in a way that changes our perspective forever. In order to fully appreciate it we need to track back to the book of Genesis. There God shows us that his desired dwelling place from the very beginning was with the people he created. He tells them, “Be fruitful and multiply and *fill* the earth”.³ A holy God is there—and he's the great *Homemaker*. But it doesn't last, because a rebellious humanity is also there—and we are the great *homewreckers*.

³ Genesis 1:28

Because of sin, our rejection of God's household rule, the Garden of Eden doesn't work. But God graciously tries this again with his Old Testament people, the Jews. After saving them from slavery in Egypt he comes to make his dwelling place with them in a tabernacle, a holy tent that they set up wherever they go. We read in the book of Exodus:

³⁴ Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Exodus 40:34-35

And once God leads his people into the land he promised them, and he instructs them to build a temple which is to serve as his dwelling place among them. We read in 1 Kings:

¹⁰ And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, ¹¹ so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord. 1 Kings 8:10-11

In all of these you get a sense of fullness, of God filling up a place with his presence among his people. In the beauty of the communal God he is, this is where he wants to be most.

Unfortunately, it just doesn't last long. Once again God's people try to rule the house. Eventually, the prophet Ezekiel even receives the sad vision of God's presence departing from the temple.⁴ This just isn't working! Among *us* how will there ever be a place fit for God?!

Well that's exactly what Paul is going to teach us about today.

1) 3 Things God's Dwelling Place Is: Kingdom, Temple, Household

This brings us to our first group of images: 3 things God's dwelling place is: a kingdom, a temple, and a household. We read this in Ephesians 2:19:

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, Ephesians 2:19a-b

⁴ Ezekiel 10:18-19

If you were with us last week, we learned about how through a Jewish Messiah, Jesus Christ, God created a new people not based on belonging to a certain ethnicity or adhering to a certain law. That new people, the church, is made up of both Jews *and* Gentiles. The wall of hostility that separated them was taken down, because now the way to God for all people is by grace through faith in Jesus. “So then,” Paul says, if you are in Christ, you are no longer strangers and aliens.

Where I lived overseas many of the churches were designed like the Old Testament temple, with walls separating the courtyard from the holy place from holy of holies. And only certain people were “clean” enough to enter the different parts. So it was normal to see people standing sad and reverent in front of a wall, because, in their understanding, they were separated from God and his people.⁵

But this should never be! A new and living way God has opened up for us! When Jesus’ body was torn open, and thus the curtain wall that separated us from God’s presence was torn open, we now have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus.⁶ And we are “fellow citizens with the saints”. That is the language of a kingdom, and this is the first image Paul gives us of God’s dwelling place.

Being citizens of a kingdom was a big deal for the Ephesians as they were *Roman* citizens. It’s a big deal for you and me to be *American* citizens. But as people around the world fight for their lives against Coronavirus, what value will their earthly citizenship have after they take their last breath? Far, far greater is to be a *heavenly* citizen. Paul tells us in another letter that looking to Jesus means looking to a kingdom:

***20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ
Philippians 3:20***

The idea here is not just that we’re united to the King, but to “fellow saints” of his kingdom. Not just transplants who are tolerated, but those welcomed with full rights.⁷ Jesus spoke of this when he said,

11 I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, Matthew 8:11

⁵ Photo credit:

https://www.newframe.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/13Sep_Ethiopian-migrants-celebration_MC-6.jpg

⁶ Hebrews 10:19-20

⁷ Arnold, Loc 4342

In other words, you who are looking to Jesus as your security in this crisis, why are you standing sad and reverent in front of a wall? YOU BELONG. You belong with the greatest saints of history—not because of what you’ve done, but because of what Jesus has done for you. You may be experiencing isolation during all this, and the enemy is whispering to you that you’re left out. But the truth is, you belong like a member of a household. And perhaps that’s why Paul uses such language for his next image of God’s dwelling place (back to verse 19):

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, Ephesians 2:19

The most compelling part of God’s dwelling place isn’t wrapped up in how many cars he drives or what his bathroom looks like, but in his hospitality. It’s all about who’s invited and how they’re treated. All who would turn around and face God⁸ instead of running from him, he cleans up and welcomes at his family table forever.

So, what an opportunity for us at Antioch to be encouraged by our identity as family! Not just because we attend the same Sunday Gathering or Family Group. But because we are members of the same household—even when we cannot be in one another’s household. You know the longing you are experiencing to be with the body of Christ? It’s testifying to you *this very truth*: you have been made family.

And if that image doesn’t make it clear enough, Paul adds one more: that of a temple. He writes in verse 20, God’s dwelling place is

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. Ephesians 2:20-21

Now if we are keeping in mind the whole story of the Bible, then we shouldn’t be surprised that Paul ends up describing God’s dwelling place as a temple. But this isn’t just the Old Testament temple. This is a whole new thing. This is where we begin to see that God’s dwelling place is more than just a structure where he lives *among us*.

⁸ David Rohrer, *The Sacred Wilderness of Pastoral Ministry: Preparing a People For the Presence of the Lord* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2012), 40

2) 3 Things God's Dwelling Place Has: Foundation, Cornerstone, Stones

For that, we turn to our second group of images: 3 things God's dwelling place has: a foundation, cornerstone, and stones. Let's return to the first part of verse 20, where Paul says God's dwelling place is

²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Ephesians 2:20a

So the foundation is not literal load-bearing bedrock, but a group of people on whose shoulders we now stand. These were the apostles and prophets, those who were chosen to be with Jesus and to speak on behalf of Jesus.⁹ How encouraging it would have been to the Ephesians, who had never met Jesus, to know they were being led by Paul, a man who *had* met Jesus, and been appointed by him. In light of it they could trust his teaching and follow his example.

And in many ways the same is true for we Gentile believers today. This is why we cling to the authority of the word of God, not just the pastors' opinion. When we build our lives on the New Testament, we are building our lives on the apostles' teaching, which is the teaching of Jesus Christ.¹⁰ This reality is so significant to God and the construction of his dwelling place that we read in the book of Revelation,

¹⁴ And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Revelation 21:14

And yet far more significant to God's dwelling place is the next image that Paul gives us: that of a cornerstone. We read again in verse 20,

²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, Ephesians 2:20

Many of us are familiar with the ceremonial significance of a cornerstone. Often the first brick laid in the construction of a building will be memorialized in some way. But what Paul is talking about here is more than just the decorative honor of the first stone. According to architecture, a cornerstone is what allows a building to be built appropriately. It provides the precise angles so that every stone can be perfectly fitted and aligned. And thus it ties the walls together and serves as the greatest load-bearing stone.

⁹ Mark 3:14; 2 Peter 1:16-21

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:3-5

In the early 1990s archaeologists discovered five massive stones that helped form the foundation of the Old Testament temple. The largest stone measured 55 ft. long, 11 ft. high, 14 ft. wide and was estimated to weigh 570 tons. That's about the size of a tractor trailer.¹¹

What Paul is getting at here is that the cornerstone of God's dwelling place isn't some big rock that bears the weight of a temple, but a Savior who bears the weight of the world. It is Jesus Christ who:

- holds the honor of the first stone laid in the construction of God's house. Colossians 1 tells us he is "the firstborn of all creation" and "the firstborn from the dead".¹² He's not only the One who made you, but who can make you new because he died and rose again in your place.
- It is Jesus Christ who provides the precise angles so that every stone in God's house can be perfectly fitted and aligned. John 15 tells us that if anyone abides in Jesus he will bear much fruit, but apart from him you can do nothing.¹³ Through him you can be made a useful part of God's temple, but apart from him you're left outside.
- And it is Jesus Christ who ties all the walls together and serves as the greatest load-bearing stone in God's house. Isaiah 28 tells us "this is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'Look! I am placing a foundation stone in Jerusalem, a firm and tested stone. It is a precious cornerstone that is safe to build on. Whoever believes need never be shaken.'"¹⁴ What a word of good news for anxious hearts—yes, you are overwhelmed, but Jesus can bear the weight!

Bear the weight of what exactly? To be specific, the weight of God's people. This is the last of Paul's images: that of stones. We read in verse 21,

21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. Ephesians 2:21

Now I realize that we don't actually see the word "stones" in there. But I get this from 1 Peter where the same imagery is used to say, "you yourselves like *living stones* are

¹¹ Arnold, Loc 4429; Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: IVP, 1989), 94

¹² Colossians 1:15, 18

¹³ John 15:5

¹⁴ Isaiah 28:16, NLT

being built up as a spiritual house”.¹⁵ The idea is that every individual follower of Jesus is a stone that’s used in the construction of God’s dwelling place.

Many of you are probably already familiar with this because of 1 Corinthians 6, which says,

do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

While Jesus was on the earth, *he himself* was the temple, the place where “the fullness of God was pleased to dwell”.¹⁶ He said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”¹⁷ And so they did—and so he did! And after he returned to his heavenly throne, he promised to send his presence, his Spirit, upon anyone who called on his name. And so, 1 Corinthians 6, your body is itself a temple in which God dwells. Mind-blowing truth.

But as individualistic Americans, that’s usually where we stop. But Paul isn’t saying that you (individually) are God’s dwelling place. He’s saying to the church across the world and across the ages, you (plural) are God’s dwelling place.¹⁸ Listen to this in verse 22:

²² In him you [plural] also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Ephesians 2:22

You know it’s natural for us to think of God’s house as a beautiful church building. Especially if you’ve ever been to one of the massive, old cathedrals in Europe. The views literally take your breath away both inside and out. But if we were to construct a church that reflects what the New Testament teaches, then it would probably look more like this: the Temple Expiatori de la Sagrada Família.¹⁹ Why? *Because God’s dwelling place isn’t finished yet.* It’s still under construction. There are still stones to be added.

¹⁵ 1 Peter 2:4-5

¹⁶ Colossians 1:19

¹⁷ John 2:19

¹⁸ Foulkes, 96

¹⁹ Photo credit:

[https://images.adsttc.com/media/images/5254/4385/e8e4/4ecb/1700/0669/slideshow/1997_\(1\).jpg?1381253969](https://images.adsttc.com/media/images/5254/4385/e8e4/4ecb/1700/0669/slideshow/1997_(1).jpg?1381253969)

Conclusion

I know there have been many people tuning in to our livestream over the past few weeks. I'm not sure what your experience of church has been like. I would imagine that for some of you it hasn't been great, and I know that the church's shortcomings have a unique way of leaving a bad taste in your mouth.

Perhaps you are a member or attender of Antioch, but have been struggling to find much value in a church without its normal rhythms and functions.

Wherever you're at today, something I would like to remind you of in conclusion, is that the things Paul has been teaching us are based firstly on heavenly realities, not earthly experiences. Yes, later in chapters 3-6 of Ephesians, Paul will lay out all kinds of practical application from these truths. But for now, it's enough for us to know that these things are reality, that if you are in Christ, you (plural) are God's dwelling place—not just when your experience of the church is pleasing. This is your *24/7 identity*. This is the temple to which you've been cemented. This is preparing you for God's great announcement:

“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. Revelation 21:3

Therefore, let us help fill up our Father's house. If we're learning anything from the dark season upon us it's this: we can't do life alone.

So church, would you give yourselves in these days to loving the body of Christ as best you know how, and to actively welcoming others into it? Let's help fill up our Father's house!

And those outside the church, because you are outside of Christ, stop acting like MTV Cribs where you get an all-access, in-person tour of God's dwelling place—and then the door gets slammed in your face. The invitation is to come in and stay! God has made a way for you through Jesus Christ, who is asking if he might dwell in you, fill you with his presence, and use you to fill up his house. Let's pray.

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