

HOPE OF NEW WORSHIP

Ezekiel 43:1-12

In the church today many people think of worship in terms of the “music” program. We may have a “worship leader” which would be called the “choir director” in earlier times. While our recognition of the worthiness of God may sometimes be expressed in singing and music, there are many other ways to acknowledge the greatness of God and to lift Him up in our daily living.

The Jews who were in captivity in Babylon had associated worship not only with singing but also with the rituals and rites and routines that happened in the temple in Jerusalem to such an extent that they could not imagine experiencing worship in a foreign land. In Psalms 137:4 we see this idea expressed as “How shall we sing the LORD’S song in a strange land?”

In the twenty-fifth year of their captivity, God gave Ezekiel another vision of what was going to be done to restore true worship to all of God’s people. The account of this vision is recorded in the last nine chapters of Ezekiel’s prophecy. In chapter forty it began with Ezekiel being taken in a vision to Israel where he was shown a new temple and a new city. This vision and prophecy came to Ezekiel after a thirteen-year period of prophetic silence.

The prophetic vision recorded in chapters 40 through 48 is said by many commentators to be the most difficult passage in all of Scriptures. According to John Gill

The Jews forbid the reading of it till a man is arrived to thirty years of age; and then he must expect to meet with things in it he does not understand, and which must be left until Elijah comes to explain them. Many Christian commentators have omitted the exposition of these chapters; and all acknowledge the difficulties in them.

This is one of those passages that we sort of gloss over since it involves a lot of details about dimensions of the temple and of the city. We can probably recall reading about the “man” who appeared to Ezekiel with a measuring line and a measuring reed. There is a lot of uncertainty about the exact size of the city since it is said to have a circumference of 18,000 measures. It is not clear if this “measure” is a cubit or a measuring “reed” or something else. Luther thought that was 36,000 miles around the four sides. That is bigger than the earth! The bottom line is that many have concluded that all this is to be interpreted in spiritual terms rather than physical terms. Coming out of that conclusion is that this prophecy was projecting toward the establishment of the church and its influence throughout the world.

The “man” who was there to help Ezekiel with this vision is said by most commentators to be Christ Himself who appeared in the vision.

The Lord: Deserving of Worship – 43:1-5

¹ Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing toward the east; ² and behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the way of the east. And His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory. ³ And it was like the appearance of the vision which I saw, like the vision which I saw when He came to destroy the city. And the visions were like the vision which I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face. ⁴ And the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate facing toward the east. ⁵ And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house. Ezekiel 43:1-5 (NASB95)

After having seen the temple and been given the dimensions of it, the “man” directed Ezekiel to the gate that faced the east. From there Ezekiel saw in the vision the “glory” of God coming to fill the temple. Although a detailed description is not provided here, we are told that what he saw was like the other visions he had given before. We can assume that he saw the living creatures, the wheels, the throne and the likeness of a person above the throne along with the aura that radiated from these things.

You may recall that in a previous vision, Ezekiel had seen the glory of the Lord leave the temple (that was destroyed by the Babylonians) and depart toward the east. Now the return of God's glory coming from the east to enter the new spiritual temple shows the restoration that God was bringing about.

As the glory entered the temple, Ezekiel was transported to the inner court where he could see the filling of the temple with God's glory.

Most commentators agree that such a phenomenon did not occur when the temple was built following the return of the exiles from Babylon. It had happened previously when Moses dedicated the Tabernacle and when Solomon dedicated the temple he had caused to be built. The Second Temple (post exile) had been alternately built up and defiled by the various occupying Gentile nations that dominated that area for more than 400 years. In 39 BC Herod took control of the temple and killed many of the priests and defenders of the temple. He would not let the Romans enter the temple and twenty years later initiated an expansion and rebuilding of it. The main work on the temple was completed in one-and-a-half years, and the outer courtyard in eight years. Finishing touches continued until AD 63. (In AD 70, this temple was destroyed by the Romans.)

One could argue that partial fulfillment or a "type" of fulfillment happened when Jesus the Christ went into the temple during His earthly ministry. We find this prophetically mentioned in Malachi 3:1 that the Lord will suddenly come into His Temple. The mention of Him being like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap could be related to His "cleansing" the temple of the money changers and exposing the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious leaders. Other things mentioned in this passage appear to point to what will happen in the time of end as judgment approaches.

A case can be made that what happened at Pentecost fits the fact that the Lord suddenly came into the temple. The followers of Christ had waited and suddenly the Spirit of the Lord came upon them with a sound of a mighty rushing wind. The refiner's fire and fuller's soap would point to the process of sanctification that follows the new birth for every true Christian.

Because of the uncertainty surrounding the meaning of this passage in Ezekiel many leave open the option that this will all happen in the time of the end and see it associated with the Millennial Kingdom when Christ returns to reign on the earth.

One thing seems certain that we can pick up from the dimensions and description of this new temple that it is a place of worship and that place is separated from the outside world by thick walls that are more than ten feet thick and ten feet high. The lesson that we can learn for this is that our worship of the Lord should be pure and undefiled from the world or secular influences. Those things that are driven by physical and emotional impulses are to be excluded from true worship. This does not mean that true spiritual work will not affect us physically and emotional. The main question will also be what is in our hearts and what is motivating us in whatever we do.

Another lesson for us to learn is that the place of worship must have the Lord present or no worship can happen. Ezekiel saw the "glory of the Lord" coming and entering into the temple. Just as the bones that came together and were eventually covered with sinew and flesh were just dead bodies until the breath of life from God entered them and they became living bodies, the same can be said of "the church" or this new spiritual temple of which Ezekiel prophesied.

Repentance: Doorway of Worship – 43:6-9

⁶ Then I heard one speaking to me from the house, while a man was standing beside me. ⁷ He said to me, "Son of

man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever. And the house of Israel will not again defile My holy name, neither they nor their kings, by their harlotry and by the corpses of their kings when they die, ⁸ by setting their threshold by My threshold and their door post beside My door post, with only the wall between Me and them. And they have defiled My holy name by their abominations which they have committed. So I have consumed them in My anger. ⁹ “Now let them put away their harlotry and the corpses of their kings far from Me; and I will dwell among them forever. Ezekiel 43:6–9 (NASB95)

After the glory of the Lord (indicating the presence of God) entered the temple, Ezekiel could hear him speaking from the interior of the temple. This was done while the “man” was standing beside him. We see in this situation that Christ stands with us and is there to help us (our Advocate) as we hear the word of God.

The words were “this is the place of My throne.” Where is God’s throne located? The simple answer is that His throne is in Heaven. What is God’s footstool? The simple answer to that question is that the Earth is His footstool. We see this in Isaiah 66:1.

This is what the LORD says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool."

What are we to conclude? This temple is what connects heaven and earth since it has God’s throne and His footstool. In our understanding of God’s plan of salvation, we know that it is Christ Himself that provides that connection between Heaven and Earth. This temple then has to be the Body of Christ or the church of the Living God. That is the macro view and the micro view is that each Christian is likewise indwelt by God and we have within us (individually) Christ by the Holy Spirit and we are in two worlds of Heaven and Earth.

Because of this indwelling presence of God by His Holy Spirit, then we individually and corporately are to be pure and undefiled. This applies to us and to those in positions of leadership (kings). The first two things that defile are referred to here as “harlotry” and “corpses” of kings who have died. Spiritual harlotry is usually associated with idolatry and we tend to think that everyone is too sophisticated to bow down to some lifeless statue. While that is true, we still find many (if not most) people putting their trust in wealth, government, military, and their own genius. These can be just as idolatrous as Baal worship was for ancient Israel.

The defilement that is related to “corpses” of kings is likely to be worshipful veneration of past leaders and the tendency to trust in their philosophies and teachings rather than relying of the word of God and seeking God’s will for the present. It could also be related to failure to give up past practices that had worked in a different time and place rather than following the leading of the Holy Spirit which is always alive.

The other caution was with regard to setting thresholds of worldly or pagan ideas and practices next to the threshold of the entrance to the Temple. We find such error in the liberal ideas that there are many way to God and that Christianity is just one of many. We hear ignorant people making statements that give credibility to Islam, Mormonism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and any number of other false religions that many follow. While there may be moral teachings in all these, none have a means of salvation that is based solely on the grace and mercy of God. In some people’s way of thinking the only thing that separates the various “religions” is in the name only – that would be the wall that God finds inadequate as stated in verse eight.

The thin wall of separation is also evident in the claims that many people make that Jesus of Nazareth was a good person and a great teacher and that many good works were attributed to him but they will not acknowledge that He is God incarnate.

Holy Living: Design of Worship – 43:10-12

¹⁰ “As for you, son of man, describe the temple to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the plan. ¹¹ “If they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of

the house, its structure, its exits, its entrances, all its designs, all its statutes, and all its laws. And write it in their sight, so that they may observe its whole design and all its statutes and do them. ¹² “This is the law of the house: its entire area on the top of the mountain all around shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house. Ezekiel 43:10–12 (NASB95)

At first glance, it is difficult to image how the vision of the new temple and all its dimensions would cause people to be ashamed of their iniquities. This conviction would come about by the people “measuring” the plan. By measuring the plan, this would suggest that they examine the description given and determine the significance of each part – the design of the building, the structure, entrances and exits, and the statutes and laws pertaining to the temple.

First of all the great size of the temple and the city far exceeded what they had know in the past and that should cause them to expand their vision of God’s plan to go beyond the boundaries of Israel and provide salvation for all the world. The thick walls separating the place of worship from the “world” should have reminded them that God’s people are to be set apart or be a holy people. The description of the altar and the fact that it was elevated above ground level should indicate that worship was not ordinary or routine. The statutes and laws were designed to reveal the nature of God and to point people to Him. The fact that all the area of the mountain top was to be considered to be most holy should tell them that holy living was to be taken into the world in which they lived. Even though they were not “of the world” they were to impact the world with the principles of the Kingdom of God.

The ultimate description of the temple that would come to the house of Israel that should have made them ashamed of their iniquities was to be seen in the life of Jesus Christ. This revelation was continued through the work of the Holy Spirit in the church to bring conviction and to reveal the fullness of God’s plan of salvation. The testimony of the church corporate and of Christians individually should bring shame to those who are rebelling against God and point them to God’s way of salvation.

As Christians we should be able to worship the Lord in all that we do as we recognize that everything we have is from and through Him. Every act and deed should be done as unto the Lord and this turns even mundane tasks into acts of worship. Even as we look around us, we can be profoundly in awe of the creation in which God has placed us and realize that our very existence is because of His greatness, His grace, and His love.