

Why the Sunday morning gathering is essential!

1. Preamble

- a. Announce membership video meeting that will be sent out in next week's newsletter.
- b. Taking a break from our Ephesian's series...

2. Introduction

- a. What a strange couple of months it has been???
- b. Several weeks ago, our governor closed everything in our state not deemed essential.
 - i. This raised a very important question. What is essential? Asked another way, what are the non-negotiables that our society needs to survive? For weeks and weeks, the powers that be deemed that the following things were essential-
 1. The Home Depot
 2. Nail Saloons
 3. Coffee stands
 4. Pot shops
 5. Liquor stores
 6. Casinos
 7. Abortion clinics
 - ii. Conspicuously absent from this list of essential organizations are churches.
 - iii. In other words, many in our culture believe that pot shops, Casinos, liquor stores, and abortion clinics are more essential than churches.
 - iv. This was, and still is, infuriating!!!
 - v. I firmly believe that Gathering with the saints is far more essential than all of the things I just mentioned.
- c. But the question is why???
 - i. Why is gathering with the saints on the Lord's day so essential for all of humanity???
 - ii. There are many reasons, but I want to focus on just one this morning...
 1. **Gathering for church is essential because God manifests his presence when the church gathers. (repeat)**
 - iii. *To prove this point, we are going to trace the theme of "God's presence" across the storyline of the Bible, but first we must define omnipresence...*

1. God's omnipresence-

- a. God is everywhere present, but he chooses to powerfully manifests his presence in certain places throughout redemptive history. This means we must distinguish between God's omnipresence

and God's manifest presence. This is a crucial distinction. When we trace God's presence with his people, I'm talking about God's manifest presence, not his omnipresence.

i. With that distinction in mind, we can trace the theme of God's presence...

1. God's presence in the Garden-

- a. When the Bible begins, God is present with his people in the Garden (Gen. 2-3).
- b. Tragically, Adam and Eve sin. As a result, they are kicked out of God's presence.
- c. In one sense, the rest of the Bible is the story of getting back into God's presence after getting kicked out of God's presence at the fall.
- d. Since God is gracious, he makes a way for sinful humanity to be back in his presence. We see hints of this in the OT. This brings us to the next point...

2. God's presence in the wilderness-

- a. Several thousand years later... God delivers his people from Egyptian slavery.
- b. God manifested his presence as he led his people out of Egypt with a massive pillar of fire by night and a giant cloud by day.
- c. When Israel set up camp, it had to be set up in a very specific way.
- d. God commanded Israel to place three tribes on all four sides of the tabernacle, symbolizing that God wants to dwell in the midst of his people.
- e. At this point in Israel's history, God's presence was mediated by sacrifices and limited in one sense to the holy of holies.
- f. Because Israel kept sinning, God threatened to withdraw his presence from them. Moses responds in the book of Exodus...

i. **Exodus 33:15–16 (ESV)** — **15** And he (Moses) said to him (God), “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. **16** For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?”

3. God's presence in Solomon's temple-

- a. At this point, Israel has finally settled in the promised land.
- b. King Solomon builds a stone temple in the midst of Israel, so that God's presence can permanently dwell in the midst of his people.
- c. When the temple was complete, God manifested his presence...

i. **1 Kings 8:10–13 (ESV)** — **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. **12** Then Solomon said, “The LORD has said that he would dwell in thick darkness. **13** I have indeed built you an

exalted house, a place for you to dwell in forever.”

d. The temple became the focal point of Israel’s history because this was the place where God’s presence dwelled.

e. *One scholar writes,*

i. *More than the law, circumcision, food laws, and more than the land, it was the temple and the presence of God in the temple that set Israel apart from the other nations. (Fee)*

ii. *Sadly, it would not always be this way... this brings us to the next point.*

4. God’s presence in the exile-

a. Eventually, after years and years of sin, God withdraws his presence from his people.

b. This is poignantly described in Ezekiel 10 as “the glory of the lord” leaving the temple.

c. God raised up the Babylonians to destroy the temple in 586 BC. As a result, the people of God are hauled off into captivity and are no longer the people characterized by God’s presence.

d. But there is always hope...

5. God’s presence in the prophets-

a. God promises to fill the temple again, but the prophets were not referring to a literal stone temple.

i. The tabernacle and then the temple point Israel to something much greater.

ii. They point to Christ the true temple and his church, who are the living stones in the temple.

b. **Malachi 3:1 (ESV) — 1** “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

c. **Isaiah 7:14 (ESV) — 14** Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

d. Yes, a 2nd temple was built in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, but it was a disappointment. It did not live up to the grand expectations of the people (or the prophecies) and so we read in Ezekiel and Haggai that something better is coming.

e. *At the NT approaches we see two very important strands coming together in the Prophets. The restoration of the temple and the renewed presence of God.*

6. God’s presence in Jesus Christ-

a. Jesus is the true temple, the very place where God’s presence dwells-

- b. **John 1:14 (ESV) — 14** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
- c. **John 2:19–21 (ESV) — 19** Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” **20** The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” **21** But he was speaking about the temple of his body.
- d. Not only is Jesus Christ the place where God’s presence dwells, he also makes a way for us to be in God’s presence through his shed blood.
- e. He is the temple and the sacrifice!!!
- f. All those who are united to him by faith become a part of the true temple that God’s presence fills, which brings us to the next point....

7. God’s presence in the church-

- a. We have finally arrived at the church...
 - i. In the OT, the temple was the place where God manifested his presence.
 - ii. Where is the temple today? It is the church. The church is the temple of God, the place where God’s very presence dwells.
 - iii. How do we know? The NT makes this very clear...
- b. Key texts.
 - i. **1 Peter 2:4–5 (ESV) — 4** As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, **5** 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.
 - 1. Exposition...
 - a. Paul is speaking to the church, composed of Jews and Gentiles.
 - b. He is telling them that they are the temple...
 - c. They are the living stones...
 - d. When they gather, they form a spiritual building, a spiritual temple, and God’s presence comes to fill that temple.
 - e. The temple is not a physical building it is you... the church.
 - ii. **Ephesians 2:19–22 (ESV) — 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.
 - 1. Exposition
 - a. The church, composed of Jews and Gentiles, is called the household of God.

- b. Jesus is the cornerstone of this temple...
- c. We gather because of Jesus, and when we gather, God fills us, the new temple by the power of his holy spirit....
- d. Amazing...
- e. This is what all the OT temple references ultimately pointed us to.

iii. **1 Corinthians 14:24–25 (ESV)** — 24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, 25 the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

iv. **2 Corinthians 6:16 (ESV)** — 16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

1. Exposition

- a. It is not hard to pick up on Paul’s allusions to the OT temple.
- b. The church is the temple of God the place where God’s presence rests this is why Holiness matters so much to God in the church.

v. **1 Corinthians 3:16 (ESV)** — 16 Do you not know that you (ya’ll in the greek) are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?

1. Exposition

- a. Reference to Eze. 37:27
- b. Paul is thinking about the spirit promised in the OT who would come and renew the temple by filling it with his presence.
- c. What an amazing contrast to all the other temples in Corinth. This was the temple of God because it was filled with God’s Spirit.

vi. **God is present in his church, the new temple of the living God.**

vii. **Summarizing these ideas, one scholar writes,**

- 1. “The gathered church is the place of God’s own personal presence, by the Spirit. This is what marks off God’s new people from ‘all the other people on the face of the earth’ (Ex 33:16). There is not a more important word in all the New Testament as to the nature of the local church than this one! The local church is God’s temple in the community where it is placed; and it is so by the presence of the spirit alone, by whom God has now revisited his people.” (Fee, 19)

c. **Illustration:**

- i. I went to seminary in St. Louis Mo. Downtown St. Louis is filled with big, beautiful, ornate, stone churches. I love church history so I would often try to find my way into these buildings to snoop around. I remember seeing a massive church in South East St. Louis from miles and miles away. There is nothing in Spokane that would rival this church in size and beauty except maybe the Cathedral on the lower South Hill.

- ii. As we drove up to the church, we felt dwarfed by its size. We got out of our car and stepped inside the old church and the beauty nearly took my breath away.
 - iii. The marble sculptures were spectacular. The paintings were huge. The pulpit was a massive. In addition, the ceiling seemed to stretch for miles and miles above our heads.
 - iv. But all these physical things are insignificant. The church is not a building. This church was no longer a church because the gospel was no longer preached from its pulpit. As a result, the presence of God had left this church. As a result, nearly no one came to the church. Even though the sanctuary was ten times the size of this one there was only enough seating for 50 people.
 - v. When the saints gather, the gospel is preached, and the sacraments are rightly administered, God manifests his glorious and life-giving presence in the midst of his people, who are the living stones in a spiritual temple.
- d. What makes gathering with the saints essential? When the saints gather, God promises to manifest his presence in their midst. This probably raises a few questions...

8. Questions-

a. Why is God's presence essential?

- i. It is only essential if you want to experience joy and pleasure.
- ii. **Psalm 16:10–11 (ESV) — 10** For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. **11** You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.
- iii. **Psalm 84:1–2 (ESV) — 1** How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! **2** My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.
- iv. Yes, we can experience God's presence on our own, but we experience it in a much more profound way when the saints gather on the lord's day, forming the new temple indwelt by God's presence.

b. Does God promise to be present at every gathering of the saints?

- i. No...
- ii. This does not apply when you and your Christian friends read you Bibles together at Starbucks.
- iii. This promise is for the gathered church... the new temple...
- iv. This is why vimeo or youtube is not sufficient...

c. If gathering is so essential, why did we forsake gathering for 12 weeks?

- i. Those who still feel unsafe...
- ii. There are more important things than health and safety...
- iii. Some people should not gather yet...
- iv. If you are watching from home...

d. How specifically does God manifest his presence when we gather?

- i. In the singing
- ii. In the sacraments (the HS is present to drive home the realities of the gospel)
- iii. In the preaching. (Giglio sermon)

e. What should I expect when we gather?

- i. So many of us, including myself, have such low expectations
- ii. We should expect God to convict, encourage, regenerate, etc...
- iii. We should expect God to bring hope and healing.
- iv. We should expect God to act!!!

f. How can I prepare to gather?

- i. Pray for God to manifest his presence!
 - 1. This is revival...
- ii. Prepare on Saturday nights and Sunday mornings to be in God's presence.... When the saints gather...
- iii. Pray with us at our Friday and Sunday morning prayer meetings.

9. Conclusion

a. Missing Heidi in Bloomington...

- i. During my first year of marriage I had to go to Bloomington Illinois for a month of training with my company....
- ii. It killed me to be away from the presence of my new wife.
- iii. We spoke on the phone every night.
- iv. I thought about her every day.
- v. Speaking to her on the phone was not enough, I wanted to actually be present with her.
- vi. Presence matters....
- vii. Being in the presence of God matters.

b. Let me conclude where I started.... Why is church essential?

c. Church is essential because it is the only institution in the world that God promises to fill with his presence.

d. When we gather on the Lord's day around preaching and sacraments God promised to manifest his presence...

- i. In God's presence there is fullness of Joy
- ii. In God's presence lives are transformed.
- iii. In God's presence the dead are brought to life.

e. Lets pray...

