

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 26 September 2021. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The True Tabernacle

Hebrews 8:1-5

Some of you have seen the little model of the Tabernacle that my wife uses in her Sunday School class to teach her students what the Old Testament Tabernacle looked like. It is only about 18 inches long; but it contains the outer tent, the Sanctuary, and little replicas of the altar of sacrifice, the laver, the table of showbread, the Menorah, the altar of incense, the veil, and the Ark of the Covenant. It has little priests, dressed in their priestly garments; and it also has a little high priest, wearing his own special garments. Of course, this model is very basic. There were many smaller vessels and articles that were used in the Temple, such as cups, spoons, knives, plates, bowls, tongs, and censers, which our little model is too small to depict. There are many intimate details about the priests' garments which our little Tabernacle model is too small to capture, as well.

Now, there are some huge and extremely detailed Temple models that people have made over the years. For example, in Norfolk, England, there is a 20 ft. by 12 ft. model of the Temple of Jesus' day. A Methodist pastor named Alec Gerrard spent about 20 years of his life constructing it! It is made of tens of thousands of hand-made clay bricks, and it has 4,000 human figurines of priests and worshippers filling its courtyards. Historical experts say that it is the most accurate representation in the world of what the Temple of Jesus' day really looked like. (We know what it looks like because the first-century historian Josephus recorded it in minute detail.) People come from all over the world to see Gerrard's Temple model.

Now, I've seen lots of pictures of this model Tabernacle in some of my books and commentaries. The building is so realistic looking, that if you take a photograph just far enough away, and with just the right lighting, it almost looks as though it could be the real thing! At some point or other, before my kids were old enough to realise that there has been no Temple for the last 2,000 years, each of them has looked at the pictures of this Temple model and gasped, "Is that the real Temple?"

We may chuckle at this; yet, what if I were to tell you that Solomon's Temple, Zerubbabel's Temple, and Herod's Temple, were not the *real* Temple? I don't mean to say that Solomon's Temple, or Herod's Temple, was a *toy* Temple, like Mr. Gerrard's model. People *really* worshipped God there; and the sacrifices that went on in there were serious business. However, it was not the *true* Temple. It was merely *patterned* after the true Temple.

What *is* the *real* Temple, then? And *where* is it? That is what our Scripture today is all about. It is my prayer that after learning these truths this morning, you will go home with a much better understanding of what the wonderful place called "Heaven" is all about. The title of this message is ***The True Tabernacle***.

Read Hebrews 8:1-5.

I. The superiority of the true Tabernacle

In the last couple chapters, we have seen several ways in which Christ is superior. First, we've seen that Christ is superior to all the high priests of the Old Testament, because He is our *true*, eternal High Priest. The Levite high priests were priests only during their lifetimes; and their service was only symbolic of what Christ would one day do for us. In contrast, Christ's high-priestly service is the *reality*.

We've learned that Christ belongs to a priesthood all of His own--the priesthood of Melchisedec. Christ's **Melchisedec priesthood** is superior to the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament, because His priesthood is *eternal*. Also, unlike the Old Testament priests, who, themselves, were sinners in need of forgiveness, Jesus Christ is without sin.

We've learned why the **New Covenant** that Christ has established is superior to the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant was only temporary; but the New Covenant is eternal. The Old Covenant was only for Israel; but the gift of salvation that Christ has provided through the New Testament is for all mankind. The Old Covenant could never actually take away sins; but in the New Covenant, our sins are *actually* taken away, by the blood of Christ.

Christ is a superior High Priest; He has a superior priesthood; and He has established a superior New Covenant. Should we be surprised, then, that the **Temple** in which Christ functions as our High Priest is superior to the Temple of the Old Covenant? That is exactly what Paul is telling us in these verses. Paul is directing our attention to the *Temple* in which Christ serves as our High Priest; and He is pointing out that *this* Temple is superior to the earthly Temple in which the Old Testament priests served.

Let's read **verse 1** again. (**Read verse 1.**) At this point, Paul is pausing to sum up everything He has said thus far: and here is how he sums it up.

First, he says that Christ is our High Priest. The Levite high priests were only *types* and *symbols* of Jesus (sort of like the little miniature high priests in Alec Gerrard's Temple model). Jesus, on the other hand, is our *real* High Priest.

Secondly, Paul says that Christ is now "***set down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty.***" ("***The Majesty***" is simply another way of saying "God.") Now, as we've seen in past messages, *sitting down* is something the Old Testament high priests never did while they were on duty in the Temple: thus, the fact that Christ is now *seated* on His throne means that His work is done! It means that our sins are paid for! There is nothing more to be done for our salvation. Our part is simply to repent of our sin, and receive salvation as a free gift.

Now, the *third* thing that Paul points out is *where* Christ is sitting as High Priest. He says that Christ is seated "***in the heavens.***" Paul has briefly touched on this point before; but now, he is expanding on it in more detail. He's telling us that the Tabernacle (or Temple) in which Christ serves is the Temple in Heaven.

Yes, my friends: there is a Temple in Heaven. It is a tabernacle that the **“Lord pitched, and not man.”** It is a Temple that no human hand built. Paul says that this Heavenly Tabernacle is the **“true”** tabernacle. **(Read verse 2 again.)**

Why is the Heavenly Temple called the **“true”** one? Does this mean that the earthly Tabernacle, in which the Jews worshipped, was “false,” or “bad”? Of course not! It simply means that the earthly Temple was *patterned after the original* Temple, which is in Heaven.

Now, before I move on, I would like to pause for a minute, and talk about *why* there is a Temple in heaven. For some of you, this may be a new and strange concept. Perhaps it seems strange to us because we’ve come up with our *own* ideas of what Heaven is like.

We all have images of Heaven in our heads. Some of them are accurate, because they are informed by Scripture; and some are very inaccurate, because they are informed by pictures that we’ve seen in postcards, or on the telly. Unfortunately, most people have images of people sitting around on little clouds, with harps in their hands, and looking bored. (I hope that this is not your image of Heaven!) Some people imagine indulging eternally in the things that they enjoyed best on earth (such as their favourite hobbies), because they can’t imagine anything more exciting. Many people want to believe that their pet dog or cat will be in Heaven! Of course, we who know the Lord, and know the Scriptures, often conjure up images of meeting up with mothers and fathers, or with other loved ones who have gone before us, and of hanging out with them in our spectacularly beautiful mansions of light. We imagine walking by the River of Life, and eating the delicious fruit from the Tree of Life.

Now, how do these images line up with Scripture? Are there harps in Heaven? Yes, the Bible says so. Will we *all* play harps? I don’t know: the Bible doesn’t say. However, we do know that *everyone* in Heaven sings praises to the Lamb of God. Will our pets go to Heaven? No! **Ecclesiastes 3:21** says that the spirit (or “breath”) of the beast goes downward to the earth, and not upward to its Creator. (In other words, when it dies, it goes to the ground, and stays there.) *Are* there animals in Heaven? Well, the Bible says that there are horses; but that’s all we know. Will we see loved ones in Heaven? If they were truly saved before they passed into eternity, yes. Will we have mansions in Heaven? We surely will! Jesus promised, **“*In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.*”** Will we be married to our spouses eternally in Heaven? No. Jesus said that in Heaven they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God. (We will not *become* angels; rather, we will be *like* the angels, in that we will not be married.) Are there streets of gold in Heaven? Yes, there are. The Bible says that the streets are made of **“*pure gold, as it were transparent glass.*”** Will we find rest from the troubles and sorrows of this world in Heaven? Yes, we will. The Lord says, **“*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours.*”**

However, here is the big question: **“Are these things what Heaven is all about?”** The answer is, “No”! You see, many Christians do not fully understand what Heaven’s *ultimate purpose* is. **Heaven is a place where we will worship and serve God!** God’s people will be *working* there. It won’t be hard, toilsome labour; but we will labour, nonetheless: and our work will all be centred on *worshipping* God! God will have *jobs* for us there. The *angels* serve God

eternally in Heaven; and we who were redeemed from among men will serve Him there, as well. The Bible says that in Heaven, believers “*serve him day and night in his temple.*”

The earthly Temple was a place where people worshipped and served God. Why, then, should we be surprised that there is a *Temple* in Heaven, where saints and angels serve God? Let’s look at some other Scriptures, and see what we can learn about this heavenly Temple. We’ll start in the Old Testament.

Read Psalm 23:6.

When David spoke of the “*house of the LORD,*” he was talking about the Temple. Throughout Scripture, “The House of the Lord” is one of the names for “the Temple.” What, then, did David mean when he said “*I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever*”? Obviously, he wasn’t talking about the *earthly* Temple, where he went to worship God and bring sacrifices. How do we know? Well, for one thing, David couldn’t stay in the Tabernacle courtyard perpetually. (Even the *priests* weren’t there all the time.) Secondly, the *earthly* Temple wasn’t destined to be around forever: one day, it would be destroyed by the Babylonians--and, centuries later, by the Romans. Obviously, David wasn’t talking about the *earthly* Tabernacle: He was talking about the *Tabernacle in Heaven*. Let’s look at another Scripture where David expressed his intense longing to be in the Heavenly Temple.

Read Psalm 27:4.

Just as it was with **Psalm 23:6**, David is not talking about the earthly Temple in this verse. The “House of the Lord” that David is talking about is **the Temple in hHeaven**. David says that he desired, while in this Temple, “*to behold the beauty of the Lord.*” The Hebrew word for “behold” means to “*stare at or gaze upon intently.*” That’s interesting, isn’t it? Exactly how did David intend to “*gaze upon*” God’s beauty? Is he talking about standing in the court of the earthly Temple, and *thinking about* how beautiful God’s visible presence inside the Holy of Holies must be? Or is he talking about gazing upon the Lord Himself, in His actual presence? I think it’s pretty obvious that he’s talking about gazing upon God’s *actual beauty*. He’s talking about being in God’s actual presence in the Temple in Heaven, “all the days of his life” (in other words, all the days of the *life to come*—in his resurrected body, in Heaven).

Now, let’s skip to the New Testament, and look at some verses about the Heavenly Temple.

Read Revelation 4:4-5.

Read Revelation 7:9-15 and 22:1-3.

Read Revelation 8:2-5.

Read Revelation 11:19.

In these verses, we clearly see that there is a Temple in Heaven! In **Revelation 4**, we see that there is a seven-branched candlestick before the throne of God (the Menorah). In **Revelation**

7, we are told that those who die for Christ during the future Tribulation period will serve God *“day and night in his temple.”* We also find, in **Revelation 22**, that *all* believers will serve Him. In **Revelation 8**, we see that there is an altar of incense in Heaven, and that angels are involved in the maintenance of this altar. There is also an Ark of the Covenant in Heaven!

Now, the “million euro question” is: “Do these articles of furniture *literally* exist in Heaven? Or are they merely allegorical pictures of spiritual truths?” The answer is: “They *do* literally exist; and they represent the same spiritual truths that they represented in the *earthly* Temple!”

The Ark is a *picture* of God’s throne, whereas God Himself, sitting upon His throne, is the reality. It would seem that the Ark of the Covenant sits at the *base* of God’s actual throne; and we know, from **Hebrews 12:24**, that some of Jesus’ blood is literally sprinkled on the mercy seat of that Ark, as an eternal token that our sins are paid for!

We know, from **Revelation 19**, that there will be a marriage feast in Heaven. From this, I believe we can gather that there are Tables of Shewbread in Heaven, just as there were in the earthly Temple. The heavenly Table of showbread is a *picture* of fellowship with Christ. Of course, the *reality*, which the Table of Shewbread merely pictures, is that Christ Himself will be sitting on His throne, and that His people will be gathered around Him, and will fellowship with Him for all eternity!

The Menorah is a picture of the Holy Spirit, who gives light and understanding to God’s people. The Holy Spirit, of course, is invisible to our eyes; but He is the reality.

The altar of incense is a picture of the prayers of God’s people, which ascend up to God. Of course, God doesn’t need smoke in order to hear our prayers; but the ascending smoke is a perpetual reminder that God is listening to the prayers of His people day and night.

Brethren, the streets of gold, and the gates of pearl, are not “allegorical”; and neither are the articles of the Temple. In Heaven, God’s people are worshipping and serving Him in a *literal* Temple: and that Temple is the *original* Temple of God. Every earthly Temple that God’s people ever built was patterned after the heavenly one.

II. The purpose of the true Tabernacle

So far, the verses that we have examined have focused on the *service* of God’s people within the Heavenly Temple. However, the most important aspect of the heavenly Temple is that *God* is there, seated on His throne. *Our High Priest, the God-Man, Jesus Christ*, is seated on that heavenly throne; and from His throne, He makes continual intercession for His people to God the Father. This is the *most important aspect* of the Heavenly Temple. This is what truly makes the Heavenly Temple...the Heavenly Temple!

Let’s take a look at *how* Jesus Christ is serving as our High Priest in this Heavenly Temple. We’ll start by reading **verse 3** again. (**Read verse 3.**) Who is *“this man”* of whom Paul speaks? It is the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is saying that just as there were sacrifices for the *Levite priests* to offer in the *earthly* Temple, so there is a sacrifice that Christ, our High Priest,

offered up in the Heavenly Temple. On the day of His resurrection, He ascended to Heaven, and offered His own blood on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant in Heaven, as the ransom for our sins. Jesus doesn't offer up *sacrifices* in the Heavenly Temple: He offered up only *one* sacrifice. Christ made only *one* sacrifice for our sins 2,000 years ago, on the cross of Calvary; and He will never repeat it again.

By the way, the verb "**offer**" here in **verse 3** is in the Greek *ao*rist tense. The aorist tense indicates an action that was done and completed at a definite point in time *in the past*, but which continues to have a lasting effect *in the present*!

Why is this important? Because it shows that Christ's sacrifice was made one time in history, on Mount Calvary; and His blood was offered up to the Father in the heavenly Temple, after Christ resurrected and ascended back to His Father. Christ's sacrifice is *once for all*; His blood washes away *all* sin; and He saves *to the uttermost* those who come unto God by Him.

Christ's blood will never lose its saving power. There is no sin for which Christ did not pay, or for which He *could* not pay. Every sin of every man and woman is paid for; and it is eternally effective to wash away sins. Should you be trusting in your own good works, and your own righteousness, you are rejecting Christ's once-for-all sacrifice. You must receive God's gift of salvation by repentance of heart, and simple faith in Him!

Now, let's read **verse 4** again. (**Read verse 4 again.**) What does Paul mean when he says, "**For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest?**" He's saying that Jesus could not have served as a high priest in the *earthly* Temple while He was here on earth, because He was not from the priestly tribe. He was not from the tribe of Levi, but from the tribe of Judah. As a non-Levite, He was not allowed to offer up sacrifices in the Temple. However, as God Almighty, He was the *true* High Priest. As God, He is from the priesthood of Melchisedec. As God, He is the Mediator of the New Covenant. As both God *and* Man, He is the One who was able to make the forgiveness of sins possible, and to open the way to the Father.

Now, let's look at **verses 4 and 5** again. (**Read verses 4-5.**) In **verse 5**, Paul says that the Old Testament priests, who offered gifts according to the Law, served "**unto the example and shadow of heavenly things.**" In other words, all the rituals that they performed were pictures of heavenly truths—truths about God the Father, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and salvation.

Everything that God commissioned the Levite priests to do in the Old Testament Temple was a "**shadow**," or picture, of a heavenly truth. The articles of the Temple, and the rituals that were performed by the priests, and the feasts that were celebrated at the Temple, pictured many things. For instance, they pictured the three Members of the Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They pictured Christ's one-time, eternal sacrifice for our sins on the cross. They pictured the removal of our sins in salvation, as well as the believer's *daily cleansing* from sin, through the Word of God. They pictured the fellowship that God's people have with Christ as they stay cleansed from sin, and feast on His Word. They pictured the illuminating, regenerating ministry of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers. They pictured Christ's intercession for His people to God the Father. They pictured the priesthood of all believers (the fact that every believer is a priest before God). They pictured the future bodily

resurrection of the saints. They pictured Christ's imminent return in the Rapture, and His Second Coming. They also pictured His future thousand-year reign on earth. Now, if that sounds like a heavy dose of truth, please realise that this is only a "skeleton" outline of all the truths that the Tabernacle and its rituals pictured! As believers living on this earth, we are experiencing many of these spiritual realities right now. We will continue to experience them after the Resurrection. We will continue to experience them all the way through the thousand-year Kingdom of Christ.

Yet, what will happen *after* the thousand-year Kingdom of Christ has expired? What will happen *after* the present universe has been burned up, the final resurrection has taken place, the final judgment and sentence of the unsaved has happened, and God has created the New Heaven and New Earth? Will there be a Temple then? Let's find out.

Read Revelation 21:9-22.

When human history on this sin-cursed earth has ended, and all God's people from all ages have been resurrected, and there is no more presence of sin in God's people—*then* there will be no more Temple. Why? Because there will be no more need to *picture* Christ's High Priestly intercession for His people. We will have no more spiritual infirmities to hinder our fellowship with God; *and*, we will not be separated from Him! We will be in His very presence, before His throne. From that point onward, God alone will be the Temple! We will spend eternal ages praising God and serving Him in that wonderful city, the New Jerusalem!

Conclusion: God's Word says, "*As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*" Heaven is a glorious place! However, as we've seen this morning, Heaven will not be a place of idleness. It will be a place of eternal service and praise to the God who has redeemed us.

In light of all this, I have two questions to ask. **First, "Are you on your way to Heaven?"** Perhaps, as we've studied about Heaven this morning, you find that you are not thrilled at the thought of *serving and praising God* for eternity; and perhaps the *reason* it doesn't sound exciting to you is that you have never known the joy of having a personal, saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

If you are not saved, then you could not *possibly* enjoy Heaven, even if God *were* to let you in as you presently are (in your sin). Why? Because Heaven will be all about serving God: and *your* life is all about pleasing, and seeking happiness for, *yourself*. Perhaps to you, "serving God" is, at best, performing some ritual, such as going to church; and even then, you want to get it done as soon as possible, because it brings no joy to you.

In one of our hymns this morning we sang, "Fading is the worldling's pleasure, all his boasting pomp and show; *solid joys* and *lasting treasure* none but Zion's children know." If you cannot naturally sing or talk about Jesus' forgiveness, because you have never known the joy of having your sins forgiven, won't you come to Jesus today? He is ready and willing to save you, and to give you "solid joys and lasting treasure."

My second question this morning is: If you *are* saved, are you serving God with all your heart?
Have you lost some of the joy of serving Jesus, because you've allowed other things of this life to have your heart? If so, why not get right with the Saviour today, and return to sweet fellowship with Him?