

ESSENTIAL TRUTHS

Stark Road Gospel Hall - Summer Bible Studies
August 28, 2002

METAPHORS FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

INTRO: Readings (1 Tim 3:15; Gen 28:16-18; Jud 18:31; 2 Chron 5:14; 1 Cor 3:9-10, 16)
Definition of a metaphor – application of a word or phrase to an object it does not literally denote for the purpose of making a comparison.
Local Church – a company of believers gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus in a locality.
Greek word for church (ekklesia) means a called out company.
Closest English words are “assembly” and “congregation”.
Definition given by Christ in Matt 18:20 – “two or three gathered together in my name ...”
Church is not the building but the assembly of people.

A. HOUSE OF GOD

1. Definition: The dwelling place of God among men. A place where God meets and communes with men. It is a place where God is at home and where his rule and authority are honored. While God is omnipresent, God’s desire has always been to dwell with men on a collective basis. Throughout history He has often chosen to have a unique dwelling place among men, such as the Garden of Eden, the Tabernacle, the Temple and the local church, which will climax in God’s permanent dwelling with men in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:3).

2. First mention: Found in the experience of Jacob (Gen 28:17, 22)
The place where God meets with and reveals Himself to Jacob is Bethel – “house of God”. Many of ideas embodied in the concept of the “house of God” in scripture are found here:

- * Presence of God – “the Lord is in this place”
- * Divine Revelation – God reveals himself to Jacob as the God of his fathers.
- * Communication between God and man – God communicates with Jacob
- * Lordship of God is acknowledged – “the Lord is in this place”.
- * Reverence toward God displayed – Jacob was afraid.
- * Worship – oil poured on the pillar and Jacob’s promise to God he would give a tenth.
- * Covenant blessing – God meets with Jacob on the basis of his covenant w/ Abram.
- * Pillar of testimony erected – monument to God’s revelation and His presence.
- * Gate of heaven – it is the link between heaven and earth for that time period.

3. Tabernacle (Tent of Meeting) as the House of God.

- a. Its identification as the House of God.
 - * Next 4 uses of term relate to worship in the Tabernacle (Ex 23:19; 34:26; Deut 23:18; Josh 6:24) – bringing offerings and firstfruits to the Tabernacle.
 - * Tabernacle often referred to as the “house of God” or “house of the Lord” (Jud 18:31; 19:18, 1 Sam 1:7; 3:15)
 - * God Himself refers to the Tabernacle as “my dwelling place” (1 Sam 2:32).
- b. Features of the house of God as seen in the Tabernacle:
 - * Tabernacle was made according to very precise plans revealed by God to Moses. God will not dwell anywhere and everywhere.
 - * God’s presence was there – represented in the glory cloud.
 - * Pattern for Tabernacle given in association with the Mosaic covenant (Ex. 24).
 - * It was a place of worship. Worship was to be carried out in a divinely prescribed plan.
 - * It was a place where God would reveal himself to man – Priest to reveal mind of God.
 - * God’s holiness was carefully guarded – man could only approach in a certain way.

4. Temple as the House of God.

- a. Its identification as the House of God.
 - * Temple often referred to as the “house of God” or “house of the Lord” (1 Kings 7-10,

- 1 Chron 17,22; 2 Chron 2-7; 100+ times throughout Prophets and historical books)
- * God Himself refers to the Temple as “my house” (1 Chron 17:12).
- * Use of term in connection with rebuilt temple of the exiles.
 - Used by the prophets (Hag 1:14; Zech 7:2; 11:13)
 - spoke of the “house of God”, “house of the Lord of Hosts”, “the Lord’s house”
 - Used by God Himself (Hag 1:2,4,8,9; Zech 1:16; 3:7; 4:9)
 - Identified as “My House”, “house of God”, “house of the Lord”

- b. Features of the house of God as seen in the Temple:
 - * All the features from the Tabernacle are seen in the Temple.
 - * Temple made according to precise plans revealed by God to David (1 Chron 28:12,19)
 - * Promise of the temple given in connection with the Davidic Covenant (1 Chron 17)
 - * David was forbidden to build the Temple – principle that the house of God can not be established by anyone. God determines the location and formation of His house.
 - * Both Gentiles and Jews worked together in the construction – foreshadowing the unity of fellowship in the local church.
 - * Temple was dominated by pillars to the name of the Lord – idea of public testimony.

5. House of God identified by the Lord Jesus

- * Christ spoke of the Tabernacle as the House of God (Mt 12:4; Mk 2:26; Lk 6:4)
- * Christ referred to Herod’s temple as “my Father’s house” (Jn 2:16) and as “My house” (Mt 21:13, Mk 11:17, Lk 19:46)
- * Similar term used of Heaven (Jn 14:2) – “ in my Father’s house”.

6. Local Church as the House of God (1 Tim 3:15)

Tabernacle and Temple are past – destroyed in A.D. 70

Local church is the place where God dwells among his people in this age.

Features of the House of God:

- a. **Place where God dwells with his people.** It is the “house of God”
 - Term used in O.T. for God’s dwelling place – Tabernacle/Temple
 - In O.T. God revealed his presence by the glory cloud.
 - Though not seen visibly in N.T. era, God’s presence is assured (Matt 18:20).
 - God is present when the assembly is gathered together.
 - Implications of God’s presence:
 - * Priority of attendance.
 - * Reverence reflected in attitude and dress.
 - * Purity and righteousness in motives, words and actions.
 - * Devotion which transcends the failures of other believers.
- b. **Place where God’s authority and rule are honored.** It is the “house of God”.
 - i. The assembly is based on God’s pattern – as set forth in the apostle’s doctrine.
 - Assembly is based on divinely given plans - just like the Tabernacle and Temple.
 - Plurality of elders, multiplicity of teachers, boundaries for purity, priesthood of all believers, supremacy of God’s word, headship demonstrated, control of the Spirit.
 - ii. An assembly is established by God.
 - God takes the initiative to establish His house. Intends it to be more than transient.
 - Every place identified as “house of God” established on basis of God’s covenant.
 - Tabernacle – Mosaic covenant. Temple – Davidic covenant
 - Church – “this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you”
 - Each member of assembly is gathered out by God to meet in his name (Matt 18:20)

 - Assemblies are not to be formed for human convenience (Acts 20) or by human initiative alone (i.e. David forbidden to build the temple by God).
 - iii. An assembly upholds the holy character of God.
 - Necessity for moral and doctrinal purity – discipline meetings and seat of unlearned.
 - 1 Tim 3:15 “that you may know how to behave in the house of God”
 - iv. An assembly is a place where God’s authority is supreme.

- God's divine rule and order are obeyed.
- * Lordship of Christ is acknowledged
- * Word of God is given supreme authority
- * Holy Spirit leads and guides the gatherings
- * Godly overseers are recognized
- * Each believer has a place of responsibility and privilege.

c. Place of Communion between God and man.

- A house provides the setting for relationship building. In the private setting of our houses we get to know each other in a way that is not possible in a public setting.
- i. Place where man is able to worship God - priesthood of all believers.
Assembly is where we can fully function as priests worshipping and serving God.
 - ii. Place where God reveals himself to man.
Gifts of teacher and evangelist are fully operational.
Environment which fosters spiritual growth – through examples, fellowship, service.
 - iii. The assembly is the “gate of Heaven” (see Matt 18:18-19)
Assembly is to be the link between God and a fallen world.
The repository of God's truth and the witness of God's salvation.
 - iv. Place of fellowship between men.
Portrayed in the joint construction of the temple by Jew and Gentile.

B. TEMPLE

Definition: a sacred place or shrine that is the home of a god or idol.
Used in the O.T. to refer to Solomon's Temple and later restorations.
The assembly is referred to as a Temple which holds the presence of a triune God.

- * Temple of God – the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16-17)
- * Temple of the living God (2 Cor 6:16) – in contrast to the home of idols.
- * Christ is there (Matt 18:20) – “there am I in the midst”.

Implications:

- Assembly is to be a place for collective worship.
- Reverence – concept of sacredness (1 Cor 3:17). As a temple the assembly is holy.
“If any man defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him”.

C. PILLAR OF THE TRUTH (1 Tim 3:15)

Pillar – idea of a monument or banner – often honoring a person or a work.
Concept of public testimony to the truth.
Looks back to Jacob's pillar and the pillars of the Temple.
The assembly is to be a pillar to the truth.

- * In the worship meeting we “proclaim” the person and work of Christ.
- * In the gospel we “herald” the person and work of Christ.

D. GROUND OF THE TRUTH (1 Tim 3:15)

Word “ground” means a stay or support or buttress.
Church is to maintain the truth of God – the “faith once for all delivered to the saints”.
Failure of human religious organizations (as seen in Christendom) to remain faithful to the truth
Examples of departure: clarity of gospel, headship, priesthood of all believers, baptism.
There are features of an assembly designed by God, which enable the maintenance of truth:
- plurality of elders, supremacy of Scriptures, authority of Spirit, multiplicity of teachers.

E. GOD'S BUILDING (1 Cor 3:9-15)

Metaphor is not of a completed structure but a building under development.
Foundation of any assembly is Jesus Christ (vs 11)
Each member (especially teachers) is building into the assembly things that will perish (wood, hay, stubble) or things that will last (gold, silver and precious stones).
There is a future day of review – our work will either be burned up or we will receive a reward.
Concept of a building project emphasizes unity of purpose.
Application: What am I building into the assembly?

F. GOD'S FIELD OR HUSBANDRY (I Cor 3:9)

Church likened to a garden - Paul planted, Apollos watered but God gave the increase.

Emphasizes the planting of an assembly.

Assembly viewed as producing fruitfulness for God.

Diversity of fruits within a garden – diversity of personalities, gifts and talents.

Gardens must be watered (necessity of the Word) and walled (necessity for protection from outside influences).

Place where God produces fruit in the lives of believers – development of gift, character and service. Assembly is designed as a place where we can flourish spiritually.

Application: What fruit am I producing for God in the assembly?

G. BODY OF CHRIST (1 Cor 12:27)

Church is seen as an organism under the control of the Head (Christ) through which Christ can express himself.

Unity of life – all members have the same life – when one hurts all hurt (vs 26).

Each member has a function, a gift and a place in the assembly (vs 18).

Each member is necessary (vs 21-22).

No one member is sufficient by himself (vs 17,19).

Members are interdependent – they should have same care for each other (vs 25-26).

Application: Every member of an assembly is vital to the testimony!

H. CHASTE VIRGIN (II Cor 11:2)

Picture of singleness of heart – devotion and faithfulness.

Clearly includes the idea of purity of doctrine.

Application: How devoted am I to the assembly? To the apostle's doctrine?

I. FLOCK OF GOD (1 Pet 5:1-4; Acts 20:28)

Conveys the love of the Savior for the assembly and the tenderness with which he views each member of the assembly.

Overseers must lead by example rather than domination (vs 2-3) (also Acts 20:28)

Leaders are seen as among the flock rather than over them.

Overseers are to shepherd the flock – idea of care, concern, feeding, protecting.

Christ is the Chief Shepherd (vs 4)

Church is to be a place of care and responsibility.

Application: Do I value each believer as the Chief Shepherd does?

J. GOLDEN LAMPSTAND (Rev 1-3)

Imagery of light shining in darkness – idea of testimony and witness for God in world.

Each church in Rev 1-3 had a certain testimony before God and in world.

Christ's authority over each church is demonstrated as He walks among the lampstands.

Reveals the idea of accountability to Christ alone.

Application: How would Christ define the testimony of this assembly?