

I. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

- A. In our last session we began to lay a foundation for an answer to the question “why the house of prayer?”, beginning with the Bible’s central message of the glory of God and the coming day of the LORD when Jesus will be supreme in all things. In this session, we’re going to examine humanity’s identity as priests to God and its importance to night and day prayer.
- B. We must begin by remembering that things have not always been as they are now. We are, of course, living in an evil age in which things are profoundly skewed from God’s original design. The fall of man had moral, relational, and cosmological implications.
- “who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,” (Galatians 1:4 NKJV)***
- C. The good news that the Scriptures exhort us to cling to is all which was lost at the Fall will be *restored* and *reinstated*. All of Scripture testifies to the day when God will bring about what Peter summarized as “the restoration of all things” in Acts 3:21.
- “Repent...so that...He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” (Acts 3:19-21 NKJV)***
- D. The coming day of Christ’s preeminence in all things must also be seen in this light. Because of the effects of sin, unredeemed humanity today lives primarily to serve themselves. This mindset is completely hostile to the LORD’s vision for Jesus having the full affection, attention, allegiance, and adoration of all humanity. Therefore, the true fruit of salvation is a change of *identity* at our core, where we live, breathe, and exist *to serve Him* once again. The Westminster Catechism bears witness to this truth through a simple declaration: “*Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.*”
- E. Humanity can never have a sense of *ultimate* destiny unless we have a sense of *original* destiny. Why did God create mankind? What purpose do we serve? In order to rightly answer questions like these, we must look back to Genesis and begin with the first man, Adam, and where he spent his days before the Fall.

II. THE GARDEN OF EDEN AS A SANCTUARY

“Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.” (Genesis 2:15 NKJV)

- A. Rather than a lush grove of fruit trees as typically pictured in the modern mind, the Garden of Eden should be understood as *a sanctuary for God’s dwelling*. There are very clear indications from the biblical descriptions of the Garden that lead us to view it as a sanctuary.

The garden of Eden is not viewed by the author of Genesis simply as a piece of Mesopotamian farmland, but as an archetypical sanctuary, that is a place where God dwells and where man should worship him. Many of the features of the garden may also be found in later sanctuaries, particularly the tabernacle or Jerusalem temple. These parallels suggest that the garden itself is understood as a sort of sanctuary.¹

- B. In Genesis 3:8, the verbs used to describe God walking through the Garden are used later in the Old Testament to describe God’s presence with Israel in His tabernacle and Temple.²

“And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day,” (Genesis 3:8 NKJV)

“I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people.” (Leviticus 26:12 NKJV)

“For the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you; therefore your camp shall be holy, that He may see no unclean thing among you, and turn away from you.” (Deuteronomy 23:14 NKJV)

- C. Gardens in Ancient Near Eastern culture were very different than we understand them. They were walled and enclosed, very special places associated with royalty and divinity.

“Next we need to understand the designation “garden.” The word generally refers to a parklike setting featuring trees and what we could call landscaping. This is in contrast to the American usage of garden, which, more often than not, refers to a small rectangular plot of ground with rows of vegetables or flowers...In the same way that a garden of the palace would be adjoining the palace, Eden would then be the source of the waters and the residence of God, and the garden would adjoin God’s residence. Gardens of this variety were a common feature in palace complexes in the ancient world...They were planted with fruit trees and shade trees and generally contained watercourses, pools and paths...Temple complexes also sometimes featured gardens that symbolized the fertility provided for by the deity.”³

- D. Thus while it is very appropriate to imagine the Garden as a place of remarkable fruitfulness and beauty we should also picture it as including structural features such as walls and streets and gates and chambers, etc.
- E. The fact that this was indeed true of the Garden of Eden was that the LORD stationed cherubim to guard the entrance to the garden. If the garden was simply a large open plot of land with vegetables and flowers growing, an entrance makes little sense.
- F. In addition, features seen later in Israel’s story of the tabernacle and temple reinforce seeing the garden as a sanctuary where God and man communed together when the earth was young.

¹ G.J. Wenham, ‘Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story’, Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies 9 (1986), p 19.

² See Ross, *Hope of Glory*, p 90 and T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), p 23

³ IVP Dictionary on the Pentateuch under the entry on *Eden*, p 203.

III. THE ORIGINAL DESIGN OF MAN AND ADAM’S CHARGE

“Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.”
(Genesis 2:15 NKJV)

- A. As a result of the typical view of the Garden of Eden as just a little more than a plot of vegetables, fruit trees, and flowers, Genesis 2:15 is most often misunderstood as a command for Adam to be the first farmer. Though Adam may have had agrarian responsibilities in the garden, a closer look at this passage reveals that much more was intended.
- B. Verse 15 reiterates the placement of the man within the Garden of Eden. Yet conjoined as it is with the purpose of his presence there, a different Hebrew word for “put” is used. The choice of language in verse 15 literally means that Adam was ‘set to rest’ in the Garden. This word is later used in the Old Testament to describe God’s Sabbath rest and His desire for a resting place.⁴ Thus this specific word conjures those images and corresponds to the understanding of the Garden as a sanctuary.
- C. It is true that the word often translated ‘cultivate’ in Genesis 2:15 can have an agricultural meaning when standing alone. Yet whenever these two words (“tend” and “keep” in Hebrew) are paired together throughout the rest of the Old Testament within a fifteen word range, they *always* refer to either to the Israelites serving God and keeping His commandments or to priests who serve the Lord and guard His sanctuary.⁵

Numbers 3:7-8, Numbers 8:25-26, Numbers 18:5-6, I Chronicles 23:32, Ezekiel 44:14

- D. Thus the best rendering for this passage is likely that Adam was “set to rest” within the Garden in order *to serve and guard* [i.e. the sanctuary]. This does not necessarily preclude the idea of Adam actually stewarding the physical features of the Garden but clarifies that this was an overtly *priestly service* (just as priests and Levites were later to care for the tabernacle/temple).

Therefore...if the garden was an archetype or pattern of the sanctuary, then humans were the archetypal Levites. Accordingly, Adam and Eve were created to serve the LORD, not the ground - they were like the priests who had the responsibility for the care of all the divine institutions in the sanctuary...All the details of the text then indicate that God created human beings to serve him in a spiritual capacity.⁶

- E. That this was indeed the case is further clarified by the consequences following Adam’s sin. The task which was appointed to Adam was transferred to the cherubim as seen by the same word used for “guard” in Genesis 3:24. Beale summarizes this point:

⁴ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, p 105

⁵ Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, p 67; Also Ross, *Hope of Glory*, p 105-106

⁶ Ross, referencing the work of Cassuto, has here argued that the linguistic features of the Hebrew in the passage should be understood as reflecting that the ‘serving’ and ‘keeping’ were overtly spiritual acts before the Lord and do not need to be referencing the Garden itself in the agrarian sense. *Hope of Glory*, p 106.

When Adam failed to guard the temple by sinning and letting in a foul serpent to defile the sanctuary, he lost his priestly role, and the cherubim took over the responsibility of 'guarding' the Garden temple...The guarding function of the cherubim probably did not involve gardening but keeping out the sinful and unclean, which suggests that Adam's original role stated in Genesis 2:15 likely entailed much more than cultivating the soil, but also 'guarding' the sacred space.⁷

IV. ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

- A. Contrary to a modern belief when the passage is often times misunderstood as referring to Lucifer, I believe Ezekiel 28:11-16 clearly depicts *Adam as the first high priest*. Adam is being described as adorned by various precious stones, and the names found in Ezekiel correspond to nine of the twelve stones on the breastplate of the high-priest as described in Exodus 28:17-20 and 39:10-13. In the Septuagint, Ezekiel 28:13 has all twelve of the stones and they correspond in order to the lists in the book of Exodus.
- B. Ancient Jewish tradition extensively affirms the priestly identity of Adam. Examples:
1. The Aramaic translation of Genesis 2:15 states that Adam was placed in the Garden 'to toil in the Law and observe its commandments'. The point here isn't that the verse should be translated in this way but simply that the ancient Jewish understanding of the passage placed it squarely within a priestly context.⁸
 2. Corresponding to this is the now familiar idea that Adam was the original high-priest and first in the line of priestly succession:
Both ben Sira and Jubilees, in their different ways, bring Adam into direct association with the Temple understood as Eden. According to Jubilees, the first ritual act of worship was offered by Adam immediately after his expulsion from the garden...Adam is thereby constituted the first priest in a succession which will lead to Levi, and then to Aaron and his sons.⁹
- C. It would be difficult to exaggerate the significance of this concept as it relates to understanding the purpose of humanity. The original and archetypical man was fashioned first and foremost to *minister to the LORD*. Adam and His progeny were created to be a priestly people who magnified the greatness of Yahweh. In short, *we exist for Him*.
- D. In the most primal, fundamental sense, humanity was created to be occupied as priests and from that very overt purpose, identity, and action *then* move outward. From the biblical standpoint, the priestly activities are the assumed starting point and the other tasks and commissions the secondary elements of existence.

⁷ Beale, *TACM*, p 70

⁸ Beale, *TACM*, p 67.

⁹ *Ibid.* p 90

- E. Applying this to ourselves, we can see very quickly that it is almost completely the opposite in our day. Instead of our primary identity flowing out of ministry to the LORD, all of the billions of other things that humanity does are the assumed starting point. At the root of this confusion comes the assumption that *He exists for us instead of us existing for Him*.
- F. The witness of early humanity is also clear support for the priesthood of Adam and of humanity:
1. Cain and Abel – *Genesis 4:1-7*. The very first thing Cain and Abel are recorded as doing after being born and being alive is bringing sacrifices to the LORD.
 2. Noah – *Genesis 8:20-22*. After being in the ark for a year, the first thing Noah does is sacrifice to the LORD.
 3. Abraham – *Genesis 12:7-8, 13:3-4*. The LORD makes a covenant with Abraham and immediately Abraham goes up a mountain, builds an altar, and sacrifices to the LORD.
- G. The witness of Israel as a nation is also clear support for the priesthood of humanity:
- “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.*” So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD commanded him.” (*Exodus 19:5-7 NKJV*)**
1. *To be in covenant with God is to be a priest before Him*. Although the tribe of Levi and the house of Aaron were called to minister to the LORD vocationally, the entire nation of Israel was called to be priests before God in their identity. This is because covenant is about returning to right relationship with God (reconciliation) and we were made to relate to Him in this capacity. That is the order which the idolatry of sin disrupted.

V. THE EFFECTS OF SIN

***“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed... even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...”* (*Romans 3:21-24 NKJV*)**

- A. Sin has caused our priestly identity to be undermined and neglected, and thus has destroyed the ultimate meaning and purpose of our lives. *We were created for Him*.
- B. The essence of sin must not be confused with deeds that accompany it (*Exodus 20:1-17*). At the core of man’s sinful condition is rebellion against God’s glory and substituting his own honor as the goal of his existence. We all have *fallen short of the glory of God*.

- C. At the heart of our sin is what Paul describes earlier in his letter to the Romans as “*changing the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man*” (Romans 1:23) and “*worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator*” (Romans 1:25). Instead of existing to magnify, glorify, and serve the LORD, we have rebelled against that purpose and worship created things. The created thing we love to worship more than anything is what we see every day in the mirror – ourselves.
- D. Acts 12 gives a very vivid picture of what it means to fall short of the glory of God by magnifying ourselves instead of Him:
- “Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king’s personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king’s country. So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. And the people kept shouting, “The voice of a god and not of a man!” Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died.” (Acts 12:20-23 NKJV)***
- E. Instead of existing to magnify God, man in his sin exists for his own exaltation and fulfillment and misuses created things to try and achieve that supreme end (i.e. idolatry and evil deeds).
- F. Yet we often confuse what is at the heart of idolatry. Idols do not take the place of the LORD as the living God. In our sin, *we take the place of the LORD*. Idols are simply those things which we bow to and venerate to get what we want. When Israel worshipped Baal, Asherah, or Molek, they did it to garner a successful crop or for fertility. In essence, *they were doing it for themselves*. This is the same for us today – we exist for ourselves and for our own fulfillment, and we use idols to achieve that end.

VI. THE ASSIMILATION OF GOD INTO OUR WORLDVIEW

- A. Our culture is potently narcissistic in its orientation. Self-esteem, self-absorption, self-gratification, self-promotion, self-service, self-entitlement, self-help, and personal ‘rights’ define modern existence. The core of this worldview can be summed up as simply *the consuming quest for self-fulfillment*.
- B. The danger this poses is that instead of meeting Christ and having everything turned upside down through a radical reorientation of one’s entire existence, the Gospel is at risk of being presented in such a way that God is merely assimilated into the preexisting view of the world.
- C. Through this human-centered view of reality, existence (including God’s existence) is evaluated with man as the reference point. God is seen in terms of His relation to man rather than man’s relationship to God. *We are in danger of believing that God exists for us rather than us existing for Him.*

- D. Whereas the gifts of God, which are too bountiful to number, exist to lead us into the exaltation of the Giver, we have instead come to believe that the Giver exists to bestow the gifts.
- E. The cumulative effect of this distortion is that through salvation our personal fulfillment remains the final goal rather than the glory of God, and Christ simply becomes the means to achieve that goal.
- F. The two greatest ways (not the only ways) that the human experience in this age can be transformed into a vehicle for God's glory are when we offer Him joyful praise in the midst of pain and suffering (either voluntary or involuntary), and when in the midst of circumstantial ease we shed tears of yearning for Him.
- G. In both of these acts Christ is revealed to be of greater worth than all the things that men give their affections to. Yet it is precisely both of these things that are undermined when we use Jesus as the means to gain circumstantial ease and eliminate the call to suffer from the normal Christian life.

VII. THE TRUE PURPOSE OF OUR SALVATION

- A. The salvation we have experienced through Jesus (as well as all subsequent sanctification) is *primarily* to free us from the enslaving self-compulsion caused by sin, so that we could fulfill our created purpose of magnifying Jesus as priests and yearning for the Day of the LORD when He alone will be exalted.
“For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15 NKJV)
- B. Scripture simply does not endorse the idea of Christianity being primarily the benefits *we will receive* through Jesus *now*. This is just not biblical. Instead, the Biblical thrust is in the completely opposite direction. *We are saved for Him, because we exist for Him.*
- C. Repentance, holiness, and good deeds are *vital*, but the primary fruit of regeneration is *not* moral reformation, zeal for certain causes, or faithful attendance at prayer meetings or Christian events.
- D. Rather, it is an ever-increasing adoration for the beauty of Jesus and love for the preciousness of who He is. It is *this* fruit within the soul that is utterly miraculous and impossible apart from the power of the Spirit.
“For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:6 NKJV)

“Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious... But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...” (1 Peter 2:7, 9 NKJV/NASB)

- E. The result is that we are freed from sin and illuminated to the beauty of Christ in order that we could be sanctified as vessels of worship and live to magnify Jesus in all things.

“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31 NKJV)

“For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:20 NKJV)

“If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 4:11 NKJV)

- F. Therefore to seek to defend the validity or legitimacy of a priestly life is an idea foreign to Scripture because from the Divine perspective *to be human is to be called to be a priest*. Though the consumerism machine of Western Christianity has reduced it to a trite saying, we were truly created to worship.

VIII. WORSHIP IN ANTIQUITY AND MODERNITY

- A. While the affirmation of humanity’s priesthood is important, distortions in our perspective render it incomplete. We must clarify what *worship* actually means in God’s design. This vision of Adam as a priest before the LORD serves to cut away from the concept of worship all of the layers of man’s ideas that have been laid upon it in the modern era.
1. As we return again to the beginning and behold Adam with arms outstretched in adoration of Yahweh his Creator we are able to quickly penetrate to the essence of what *worship* actually means.
 2. Originally Adam had no sin to be forgiven, he had no circumstantial needs, he had no physical needs. There was nothing that Adam lacked and he had no history of God answering his petitions.
 3. Consequently it was impossible for the basis of Adam’s worship to be his life, his circumstances, or even his gratitude for the gift of salvation.
 4. Think of Adam, arms outstretched, worshipping the LORD – He had no physical need, no history in God, and no circumstantial needs. He’s just a few hours old. What was the basis of His worship? What did Adam say to God? What were his lyrics? How did he praise? Understanding these questions and answering them rightly will lead us into the heart of worship in what it really means to glorify God.

- B. On the most practical level the application is that 95% of our “worship songs” would not have worked in the sanctuary Adam served within. If this is so, how could Adam have been preoccupied with worship as the archetypical priest?
- C. The answer is that ‘worship’ in the modern Church has in many cases degenerated into an activity that has man’s transient well-being as both its impetus and its goal. Man is the reference point, not the LORD.
- D. People ‘worship’ because they are grateful that God has given them all the stuff they want and forgiven the bad things they have done and because the music and the singing stir their emotions and makes them feel good.
- E. The same basic motivation of utilitarianism (worshipping because of its function, because it’s useful) can be expressed just as potently in approaching worship as an activity which “softens our hearts” or provides fuel for the mission and ministry of the Church.
- F. In either case, regardless of the form, the real value of worship in modernity is often seen primarily through its relationship to man and his need.
- G. Often we aren’t worshipping simply because He is God – we’re worshipping because of what He does for us or what the experience of ‘worship’ does for us.
- H. How can this be? How have we drifted so far from what we have at least glimpsed in the worship of Adam?

IX. APPLICATION TO THE HOUSE OF PRAYER

- A. This perspective on our identity, our purpose, and our salvation is vital to sustaining our commitment to night and day ministry to the LORD and for bringing others into the celebration of Jesus’ worth.
- B. Because the house of prayer’s primary purpose is to bear witness to the worth of Jesus and magnify His excellence, bringing the skewed view of salvation where Jesus exists for our need and our self-satisfaction into the house of prayer can be disastrous. In addition, engaging in night and day prayer as a utilitarian activity is equally as disastrous.
- C. The outcomes of 24/7 worship and prayer are *powerful, dynamically important, and must be understood clearly*. Among the many glorious consequences stand the following: the fruition of God’s purposes for Israel, effective corporate witness, personal vibrancy in Christ, unity and community in the body of Christ, eschatological revelation, and apostolic sending.
- D. As necessary as these are, we must distinguish between that which is central and supreme and that which is *very important* but secondary. Although unceasing worship and prayer can have dramatic results, it is first and foremost an end in itself. Perpetual, incessant worship is an end because God’s glory is His end.

One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD.... Psalm 27:4

1. Incessant worship and prayer does not exist *primarily* because there is so much need that we must petition Him unceasingly, but rather because the glory of God and the worth of Christ *demand* perpetual adoration.
2. A house of prayer has its inception when someone beholds the majesty of Jesus and in wisdom concludes that the only reasonable response is for men to laud Him ceaselessly. This is the testimony of the heavenly assembly - it must be ours too.
3. The desire that His indescribable glory would be seen and His matchless worth treasured above all else is the cornerstone upon which night and day prayer must be founded and the chief reason it continues each passing moment.
4. In the age to come, when the long-awaited reign of righteousness has finally dawned upon the earth and all injustice has been eradicated, *He will still be worthy of unrelenting worship.*
5. Our worship must be mingled with fervent intercession for the Church and the lost, but at the center of night and day devotion stands a breathtaking Beauty that knows no rivals, and His splendor alone is more than sufficient to warrant 24/7 devotion in the heavens and on the earth.