The Dwelling Place Not Made With Hands

On Pentecost, the Cloud That Filled the Tabernacle, and the Indwelling That Followed

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Pentecost: Fifty Days Out

Today, in the Christian calendar, we celebrate Pentecost. Fifty days have passed since the Passover, what we call Easter, and from a Christian standpoint, this is the definitive moment the church became what God had been promising throughout Israel's history.

Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week. He spent forty days with his disciples, teaching and instructing them. Then, ten days before the Feast of Pentecost, he told them: *wait here in Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high* (cf. Luke 24:49). The hundred and twenty disciples who followed him stayed in the upper room of a rented house and prayed for ten days. And on the day of Pentecost, when the prayer was fully come, Scripture says:

"And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting" (Acts 2:2).

That was the beginning of the rest of the story we are still living. And I love the fact that the Spirit came with a *rushing mighty wind*. That detail tells us something. It means that the Lord had waited long enough. He was *rushing* to complete what he had been promising for so many centuries. After all that history, the wind was in a hurry.

The Long Arc of God's Dwelling

The whole Bible, in one sense, is the story of God working to restore his presence and his relationship with his children. Remember the original picture in Genesis: God walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the garden. His presence was there. He communed with them face to face. When they sinned, a natural separation opened between God's presence and his creation.

Walk through the first eleven chapters of Genesis and you see his creation growing further and further away from him. Cain murders Abel. Lamech kills a man for the offense of being struck. *The sons of God* see the daughters of men. Violence fills the earth. The flood comes. After the flood, the nations spread out, and then comes Babel. *Every major rebellion in the entire arc of Scripture happens within those first eleven chapters of Genesis.*

And then God calls a seventy-five-year-old man named Abram, whose wife is barren, and says: *in you and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed* (Genesis 12:3). God was going to take action. He made a promise and bound that promise with an oath, and in that promise he planned to *dwell again with his creation* in a way that would solve the problems Genesis 1–11 had identified. He was going to do it through *blessing*. Bless Abraham. Bless his wife with a child. And through that child, somehow, set all the world right.

Yet we see, page after page, that things were not yet set right. Even Abraham's children turned out to have the same problems as the children outside Abraham's seed. The same sinful tendencies showed up in the elect line. But today, on Pentecost Sunday, we celebrate that *God put all things right through his Son*. He did not leave us without a remedy. He sent his Son into the world as the one who represented all of Israel and all the blessings and promises Abraham had been given. Paul puts it this way in Galatians 3:

"If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29).

And the *promise* Paul has been talking about throughout that chapter is the promise of *the Holy Spirit*. The presence of God. *That* is what was promised to Abraham. That is what was being held in reserve through forty centuries of waiting. That is what arrived on the day of Pentecost.

From Red Sea to Jordan: Israel's Baptism, and Israel's Failure

Let me show you how Paul reads Israel's story as the pattern for the Christian life. In Romans 5, Paul says we were justified through faith: that just as death came through the one man Adam, life now comes through the one man Jesus Christ. In Romans 6, he picks up the image of *the taskmaster*. Sin had us under its grip the way Pharaoh had Israel under his grip. And what did Israel do? They left Egypt after great help from God, found themselves trapped between the armies of Egypt and the Red Sea, and then the sea parted, and they went down into it and came up on the other side, and their enemies were drowned. Paul says in Romans 6:

"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

Now notice the strange detail in the Exodus story. Israel went down into the Red Sea, but *not one of them got wet*. The ones who got wet that day were *the Egyptians*. The water buried the enemy; it merely passed Israel through. But when Jesus comes into the world and goes down to be baptized by John, *he is the one who gets wet*. He is the one who goes under the water. He, in effect, dies in the place of *the Egyptians*, in the place of the enemy. And when he comes up out of the water, the heavens are opened and the Spirit descends on him like a dove. Then he goes

into the wilderness, where he is tempted by the devil for forty days. *Just as Israel went into the wilderness for forty years and was tested at every turn, Jesus goes into the wilderness for forty days*, and everywhere Israel failed, Jesus succeeded.

At the end of his life, he offers himself up. All of Israel's history (every blessing, every law, every curse) is gathered up into his body. And on the cross, his very last words are these:

"It is finished!" (John 19:30).

And then, fifty days after the resurrection, he takes the Spirit that had descended on him at his baptism and *pours that Spirit out* on those who are waiting in Jerusalem. Peter explains it in Acts 2: *this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh* (cf. Acts 2:16–17). The Spirit that had rested on Jesus alone is now being poured out on a *gathering*. *That* is the day Pentecost commemorates.

The Cloud That Filled the Tabernacle

Now back up to Sinai. The children of Israel came out of Egypt, came through the Red Sea, came to the mountain. And at Exodus 19, God says to Moses:

"You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself . . . you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:4, 6).

Kingdom of priests. That was the vocation. God was calling them to a way of life that would create a difference in the world: that, through his relationship with them, *all the world would find blessing*. The earth is his, and the fullness of it; but he has chosen this one people to *represent him* among the nations.

And then, while Moses is up the mountain for forty days receiving the law, the people below grow restless. They turn their hearts away. They build a golden calf. Moses comes down

to find the camp in chaos, and there is a hard moment of conversation between Moses and the Lord. God says, *My presence is not going with you. I will make a new people out of you, Moses*. And Moses pleads. Whether God was teasing out of Moses the pleading he was already going to receive, drawing him into the intercessory role, or whether the threat was genuine, Moses interceded, and the announcement that followed became the defining self-revelation of God's name:

"The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty . . " (Exodus 34:6–7).

That is the line God draws under his name. *Merciful. Gracious. Longsuffering. Forgiving.* It is the most-quoted self-description of God in the entire Old Testament: repeated by Joel, by Jonah, by the psalmists. And it is the foundation on which the rest of the story rests.

So God decides to go forward with his plan. And at the very end of Exodus, he comes down off Sinai to *dwell among them*. The entire book of Exodus, from the burning bush onward, has been building toward this moment: the building of a tabernacle, a portable tent, in which the presence of God could move with his people. And when the work was finished, here is what happened:

> Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. (Exodus 40:34–35)

Notice: *Moses could not enter*. The presence of God was so thick that even the man who had been on the mountain face to face with God could not now enter the inner space the glory

had filled. The cloud rested on the tabernacle by day. The fire was visible in it by night. *That* is how Israel knew the Lord was with them.

And whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would set out:

> Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys. (Exodus 40:36–38)

Pretty cool system for understanding the will of God. I wish it was that clear all the time, doesn't it? *Apparently God wants us to move. Let's follow the cloud.* But the principle is this: He was dwelling in the tabernacle, and when it was time to move, *he moved first*, and the people of God moved after.

The Land That Eats Its Inhabitants

They move out from Hazeroth and camp in the wilderness of Paran. Numbers 13: they carve out twelve men, one from each tribe, to go spy out the promised land. The twelve go in. They come back. Ten of them give one report; two of them give another.

Caleb says:

"Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it" (Numbers 13:30).

The other ten say:

> We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we . . . The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants . . . We were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight. (Numbers 13:31–33)

The land devours its inhabitants. What a phrase. Caleb says the land is good; the ten say the land *eats people*. And the congregation, having seen what God did to Pharaoh, having walked through the parted sea, having eaten manna every morning of their wilderness years, having drunk water from the rock, *having been fed miraculously even on the very day they sent the spies in,* believes the report of the ten. They lift up their voices and weep:

"If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! . . . Let us select a leader and return to Egypt" (Numbers 14:2, 4).

Snap. Read that and feel the whiplash. They have *seen* the miracles. They are *eating* manna at that very moment. And they want to go back to Egypt. They would rather have died as slaves than face the giants.

Joshua and Caleb tear their clothes and plead with the people:

"Do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them" (Numbers 14:9).

They are our bread. What an audacious phrase. The land that the ten said would *eat* Israel, Joshua says Israel will *eat them*. Despite the giants. Despite the Anakim. Despite the fortified cities. *God has called us, and God will see us through.* That is always how it works. When God gives us a command, he empowers us to fulfill it. *He is not going to leave us in a weakened condition if he has given us a command to go.* If his cloud lifts and his Spirit moves us on, all we have to do is be obedient, and we can trust him with the results.

But the people did not have ears to hear Joshua and Caleb. The text says Caleb had *another spirit in him* (Numbers 14:24). His heart was different. Something was wrong with the hearts of the people compared with where the heart of Joshua and Caleb were. *And we have seen, all the way back from chapter 27, that the heart is always the battleground.*

From Tabernacle to Temple

Many years pass. Israel finally enters the land. The period of the judges comes. A king is anointed, then another, and finally David becomes king. And David, sitting in his palace of cedar, looks out and thinks: *the Lord deserves his own house*. He tells Nathan the prophet, and Nathan initially agrees. But that night the word of the Lord comes to Nathan:

> "Go and tell My servant David, 'Thus says the Lord: "Would you build a house for Me to dwell in?" . . . When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."'" (2 Samuel 7:5, 12–13)

David's hands are too full of blood. His *son* will be the one to build. And not only that, the kingdom under that son will be *everlasting*. *No end to it.* That promise lands a long shadow over the rest of the Old Testament.

So Solomon builds the temple. And in 1 Kings 8, when the priests carry the ark into the inner sanctuary, *the same thing happens that happened at the tabernacle*:

> And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord. (1 Kings 8:10–11)

Notice the parallel. *Moses could not enter the tabernacle* because the glory filled it. *The priests could not continue ministering in the temple* because the glory filled it. The same Spirit, the same cloud, the same dwelling, now lodged in the permanent stone structure on Mount Zion that Solomon built.

And Solomon, praying at the dedication, says something extraordinary:

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27).

Even *as* he is dedicating the temple, Solomon knows the temple is not enough to contain the God who is choosing to dwell there. The temple, in Israel's vision, was the *meeting place*, the place where heaven and earth overlapped. The footstool of God on the earth; the throne of God in heaven; *and at Mount Zion, the two touched*. The people on earth could come and find their place at the footstool. God's dwelling place was there too. *In that one space, heaven and earth came together.*

The Temple Burned, the Promise Held

Hold that picture, because what comes next is devastating. The temple Solomon built, the one the cloud filled, *gets burned to the ground*. The kings of David's line are killed. The priests are scattered. Only a thin line of survivors makes it through the Babylonian exile. The promise of *an everlasting temple* under *the Son of David* seems impossible to fulfill. The building is rubble. The dynasty is decimated. *Where is the eternal kingdom now?*

Ezekiel is living through this collapse, and God speaks through him in chapter 34:

> I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them: My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken. (Ezekiel 34:23–24)

My servant David. David has been dead for over three hundred years when Ezekiel writes this. Who is the prophet talking about? The same one Nathan was talking about when he told David: *your son shall build a temple, and the kingdom shall be forever*. Not Solomon. Not the temple that has now been burned to the ground. *A greater Son. A greater temple. An everlasting kingdom that the rubble of 587 BC could not extinguish.*

And in Ezekiel 36, the prophet tells us *how* this greater promise will be fulfilled:

> And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord . . . For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. (Ezekiel 36:23–27)

Read that carefully. *I will sprinkle clean water on you*, the vessel of God has to be clean for the Spirit of God to dwell. (That is why the sacrifices in Leviticus involved the sprinkling of blood on the holy things of the tabernacle. The priests would go in once a year and sprinkle the inner courts to sanctify them so that God could continue to dwell among them.) Now God says he will *do the same thing to the people themselves*: sprinkle them, cleanse them, *turn the people into the temple*.

And *why* is the temple of stone going to be replaced by the temple of flesh-and-spirit? Because the problem all along has been *the heart*. The heart of stone needs to be replaced. The Spirit needs to be put inside. And then, and only then, will the people walk in God's statutes. *I*

will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes. The same vocation as before, to be a kingdom of priests in the earth, but now empowered by the indwelling Spirit rather than by external command alone.

"Where Is the House You Will Build Me?"

Isaiah, anticipating the same time of recovery from exile, says it this way:

> Thus says the Lord: "Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist," says the Lord. "But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word." (Isaiah 66:1–2)

Hear what Isaiah is saying. *Solomon was right*, the heaven of heavens cannot contain the Lord. So what *can* contain him? *A poor and contrite spirit. One who trembles at his word.* God is not going to dwell in buildings made with hands anymore. *God is going to dwell in people.*

I picture this verse like a winter evening in a family home. A father is sitting in a big comfortable chair by the fire. His children are playing with toys at his feet. He could be anywhere, but the place he most wants to be is *here*, surrounded by the children he loves. *Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool*. The Lord sitting with his children at his feet. That is the picture Isaiah is offering. Not a distant deity locked in a sealed sanctuary. A *Father*, present, attentive, surrounded by the children he loves.

Walking by the Spirit

And now bring it all the way home to Romans 8. Last week we ended in Romans 7 with Paul crying out *who will deliver me from this body of death?* Now look at Romans 8:1–2:

> There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1–2)

The law of the Spirit of life. The law itself was always *life-giving in intent*; it *promised* life. But because of the weakness of human flesh, the law could not deliver on its own promise. Paul goes on:

> For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:3–4)

Now hear that word *walk*. *Walk according to the Spirit.* The image is exactly the image of Israel in the wilderness: *the cloud rises from the tabernacle, and the people pack up and walk after it*. But now the Spirit is no longer above the tabernacle. *The Spirit is inside us.* It is an *internal* compass. It is an *interior* guide. The cloud has been internalized. Through our own wilderness journey (from the baptism of Romans 6, through the law and the failure of the flesh in Romans 7, to the indwelling Spirit of Romans 8) *the Israel pattern is fulfilled in the body of every believer*.

Israel's Sinai was Pentecost's first draft. On Sinai, the law was inscribed on stone by the finger of God. On Pentecost, *the same finger inscribes the same law on the human heart*. That is what Jeremiah promised:

> "I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jeremiah 31:33).

Walking testaments of God in the earth. That is our vocation. Not external symbols like the tabernacle or the temple were of God's presence. *Children of God,* indwelt by the Spirit, walking the same direction the cloud leads us.

If the Spirit Dwells in You

Watch how Paul folds the temple language directly into the believer's body in Romans 8:9–11:

> But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. (Romans 8:9–11)

Dwells in you. Dwells in you. Dwells in you. Three times in three verses. Paul is hammering the same Greek verb, *oikei*, which is the same verb Greek translators used in the Septuagint for the *cloud dwelling* on the tabernacle. *The dwelling-language of the Old Testament temple is now the dwelling-language of the human body*. You have become the temple. The Shekinah glory that filled the tabernacle in Exodus 40, the same glory that filled the temple in 1 Kings 8, *that glory now fills you*. The body that becomes a habitation of God cannot remain in the grave. *It will be raised.* It is the house of God.

That is why Jesus on the cross says, *Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit* (Luke 23:46), and why Stephen, dying outside the city, says, *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit* (Acts 7:59). Something happens at the deepest part of a human being when it becomes mingled with the Spirit of God in this new dwelling place not made with hands. *God means to do something in us.*

The end of death is not the end of the temple. The temple is restored on the other side of the grave: *raised, quickened, glorified*.

Joint Heirs Who Suffer

And then comes the consequence. Paul writes:

". . . if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Romans 8:17).

Joint heirs. When the glory filled the house in Exodus 40, the house was *glorified*. When the glory fills *us*, we are glorified, and the language of kings and priests from Exodus 19 is fulfilled. *We become the kingdom of priests* God promised at Sinai, only now equipped with the indwelling Spirit that Sinai itself could not supply.

But joint heirship comes with a condition: *if indeed we suffer with Him*. The vocation God calls us into is not glory without cost. The Spirit groans within creation. Creation itself groans, waiting for the revealing of the sons of God (Romans 8:19–22). And in the middle of that groaning, *we groan with the Spirit*. *Our vocation is to hear the groanings of the world.* Tune your ears to where suffering is happening, and then *go to it*, because that is exactly what the Father did when *he sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin, to condemn sin in the flesh*. Jesus was not condemned on the cross. *Sin* was condemned. And as joint heirs with him, we have a job, *to suffer with him*, to enter the world's groan, to be present in the places sin has done its damage.

"Abba, Father"

And so Paul says, just before the joint-heir verse:

"For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father'" (Romans 8:15).

Not the spirit of bondage again to fear. That phrase is doing pointed work. Not the spirit that wants to go back to Egypt. Not the spirit of the ten spies who said "the land devours its inhabitants." Not the spirit that says "would to God we had died in the wilderness." The spirit of bondage is the spirit of retreat to Egypt. It is the spirit of the flesh that goes back into slavery because the wilderness feels too hard. We are not to receive that spirit again.

Instead, we have received *the Spirit of adoption*. And the cry that rises from that Spirit is *Abba, Father*. Now notice, those two words are quoted in the Greek of Romans 8 in their original Aramaic. In Mark 14:36, when Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane grappling with the cup of suffering set before him, he cries out exactly these words: *Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will*. The cry of Gethsemane is the cry of the indwelling Spirit in every believer who has been called into the immensity of the vocation. *Abba, Father*: the same cry, in the same words. The Spirit that cried it through the Son now cries it through us when we face the cost of being joint heirs.

Pentecost: The Long Arc Closes

So what about that? Welcome to Pentecost Sunday. *This is the day the problem of Genesis 3 finally gets resolved.* The presence of God that walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the garden, and that they ran from when sin entered, has now come to dwell *inside* the people God formed for himself. The long arc from Eden to Sinai to Solomon's temple to the burned rubble to the silence of the prophets to the upper room, *all of it has been arcing toward this*.

The cloud over the tabernacle. The glory in the temple. The promised seed of David. The new heart of Ezekiel. The poor and contrite spirit of Isaiah. The law written on the heart in Jeremiah. The Son who became Israel and absorbed Israel's curse. The forty days in the wilderness, the cross, the resurrection, the forty days of teaching, the ten days of waiting, the

rushing mighty wind. *All of it concentrated into the moment when the Spirit of God came to live inside the human body of every believer who calls on the name of the Lord.*

We are children. So let's be children. We are daughters of God; let's be them. We are sons of God; let's be sons. We are the temple: *let the cloud rest on us, let the cloud lift us, and let us walk after it*. The vocation given to Israel at Sinai is the vocation we have inherited, and the indwelling Spirit is the one who carries it out in us. *That* is Pentecost. *Praise God.*