

## VI. Sacred Space in Consummation

The Fall in Eden provided the occasion for God's first promise to men. His pledge to recover all things from their estrangement by crushing the serpent through Eve's seed provided the foundational premise and essential content of every subsequent promise. All of salvation history – and therefore the totality of the biblical record – is simply the purposeful, progressive work of the triune God in fully realizing His protoevangelium.

God pledged Himself to recover what His image-son had destroyed, and the substance of that recovery – which is the recovery of *sacred space* – was realized in the person and work of the true image-son: the Last Adam and Seed of the Woman. Jesus Christ is the very substance of God's fulfillment of His promise to end the estrangement between Himself and His creation, even as He is the true sanctuary. God and man have been reconciled and joined in perfect and exhaustive spiritual intimacy in the *person* of Christ (John 1:1-14), but His vicarious self-offering and resurrection as *consummate Man* and *Last Adam* indicated that His own status as God's sanctuary pointed beyond Him to the human race. Jesus Himself is the true sanctuary, but as the *chief cornerstone*: In Him God has revealed and displayed the destiny of man as image-son; in Him formerly estranged human beings are being built together into God's consummate dwelling place. At the same time, though the restored human race is the center point of God's fulfilled sanctuary, it isn't its fullness. What began and continues in the present with the building of a human "spiritual house" will come to its final consummation in the summing up of everything in the heavens and earth in Jesus Christ.

### A. The Preface to Consummation – Already But Not Yet

Throughout this series the phrase *sacred space* has been used in reference to God's dwelling, not in terms of where God is, but **how** He is in relation to His creation. Sacred space is concerned with God's *relational* presence with His creatures rather than His spatial presence. Sacred space speaks to Creator-creature intimacy, specifically as it is mediated in and through the human creature created in the divine likeness to be image-son.

God's eternal goal is consummate intimacy with His creation to be realized through the consummation of man's own unique nature. That outcome isn't realized by humanity's return to its pre-fall Adamic state, but its re-creation according to the likeness of another "Adam." Full *christiformity* is the destiny God appointed for His image-bearer; man becomes truly human in the man, Jesus Christ (cf. Romans 8:28-30; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; Philippians 3:20-21). But Christ is also the destiny of the whole created order, first as *Redeemer*, but then as *Man*.

- Christ's work of redemption extends beyond the human race to the entire creation. In the present age the creation continues to groan under its slavery to corruption, eagerly longing for the day of its own participation in the renewing efficacy of Jesus' redemption.
- But just as the created order's subjection to corruption came through man, so also will its deliverance and renewal. The creation longs for the "*revealing of the sons of God*" precisely because its own renewal depends upon humanity's final glorification; the creation will be restored to God when man's renewal is complete (cf. Romans 8:18-22).

The created order is still awaiting its own deliverance from its slavery and entrance into the “*freedom of the glory of the children of God.*” That liberation will come with Christ’s appearing at the end of the age to abolish mortality and corruption forever. When man is set free from his mortality and brought into the consummate human glory epitomized in Christ, the “first fruits,” the rest of the creation will at last enter into its own everlasting glory (1 Corinthians 15:20-28). In that way it will realize its foreordained summation in Him (Ephesians 1:9-10).

1. God ordained this final outcome of cosmic renewal and recovery and has secured it by Christ’s once-for-all work of redemption (cf. Colossians 1:19-20 with Hebrews 7:26-28, 9:11-12, 9:23-10:18). But Jesus didn’t simply secure the creation’s restoration to God; He *initiated* it by virtue of His own enthronement and outpouring of the Spirit of re-creation. God’s predetermined eschatological outcome is already present in substance.

The so-called “eternal state” is characterized by the consummate realization of the “kingdom of God.” But that realization is simply the consummation of sacred space: the *shalomic*, everlasting *shabbat* of divine dominion exercised over the whole creation through man, the image-son. This divine-human dominion finds its substance in Christ who is both True God and True Man, but it extends from Him to those who share His likeness. As is commonly the case with human kings, the divine Father-Lord administers His sovereign rule through the sons who bear His image.

The fullness of this state of affairs hasn’t yet been realized, but its substance has. The kingdom of God as the fulfillment of sacred space has been ushered in; all that remains is its progress and final consummation at Christ’s return. Many Christians acknowledge that God has inaugurated His eschatological kingdom in His Son, *but few conceive of that truth in terms of the present existence of the eternal state.* For the vast majority of Christians, the phrase “eternal state” conjures up images of an other-worldly, everlasting existence in the presence of God in a heavenly city somewhere “out there.” The eternal state is something Christians believe in and await, but it has no place in their present earthly existence. And yet, if they can speak in terms of a present “new creation,” they are acknowledging the inauguration of the eternal state whether or not they are conscious of it. ***To contend otherwise is to argue that the new creation that Christ initiated in Himself is transitory and transitional rather than inaugural and ultimate.***

Though few Christians think of the present interadvental age as the inauguration of the eternal state, this is precisely what the New Testament indicates:

- a. When Jesus proclaimed the in-breaking of the kingdom of God, He didn’t suggest it would take a different form in the future. His coming indicated the inception of the promised new age – the “age of the Spirit,” and what had begun with Him as the “man of the Spirit” was to advance in a new race of “spiritual men.” First as individuals, and then as a corporate “house,” these “men of the Spirit” constitute God’s eschatological sanctuary (cf. Matthew 12:15-29; John 14:12-26, 17:20-23; Acts 1-2 with Ezekiel 36-37; Joel 2:28-32; Zechariah 3-4). All that remains is the completion of the sanctuary through the ingathering of the fullness of Abraham’s children (Galatians 3:26-29) and the renewal of the non-human creation.

- b. Paul likewise recognized that Jesus' coming had ushered in the eschatological "new creation" which God had long promised through His prophets. This is evident in his use of such phrases as "*ends of the ages*" and "*fullness of the time*" (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:11; Galatians 4:4). Paul regarded salvation history as being broadly partitioned into two ages: the age preceding Christ's advent and the age subsequent to it. The former was preparatory and pedagogical; the latter is the time of fulfillment or fullness (Galatians 3:15-25; cf. Ephesians 2:11-22).

This is not to imply that Paul had no conception of a future "eternal state"; he clearly did (ref. again 1 Corinthians 15:25-28, 51-58). But Paul viewed the consummation of all things at Christ's return as just that: *God's bringing to consummate fullness that which already exists.*

- Christ's cross reconciled the whole creation to God (Colossians 1:19-20), and yet the creation groans awaiting its liberation from its present slavery to corruption (Romans 8:18-22).
- So also Christ redeemed and reconciled Adam's race to the Creator-Father, yet those who are in Christ await the coming day of the "redemption of God's possession" (Ephesians 1:13-14).
- Likewise, Jesus has abolished death by inaugurating renewed life in Himself (2 Timothy 1:8-10), and yet death remains as the last enemy to be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:25-26; cf. Romans 6:1-11).
- Those in Christ are seated in the heavenly places and have their lives hidden with Him in God (Ephesians 2:4-6; Colossians 3:1-3), and yet they await Jesus' glorious appearing and their being forever joined with Him (Colossians 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; Titus 2:11-13).

Paul's conviction that the "Christ event" ushered in the substance of the eternal state is perhaps most conspicuous in his reference to the *New Jerusalem* (ref. Galatians 4:19-31). In this context he drew upon the Old Testament prophetic promise regarding Jerusalem's restoration and exaltation as Yahweh's final, everlasting sanctuary in His consummate kingdom (cf. Isaiah 2:1-4, 4:1-6, 24:19-23, 27:1-13, 33:17-21, 52:1-10, 62:6-12, 66:19-23; also Jeremiah 30:17-22, 31:1-6, 33:10-16; Joel 3:13-21; Micah 4:1-8; Zechariah 14:16-21; etc.).

As the site God chose for His sanctuary under the Israelite kingdom, Jerusalem (with its "Zion" theology) came to represent *sacred space*: the designated place of divine-human interface where men encounter, commune with, worship and serve the living God. Israelite and Gentile alike were obligated to meet God at His dwelling place (1 Kings 8:41-43), and so it was no surprise that the prophets spoke of worship in the global, eschatological kingdom in terms of all the earth's peoples coming up to Jerusalem to encounter the Lord, learn of Him and worship Him there (Isaiah 56:6-8, 66:19-23; Micah 4:1-8; also Zechariah 8:1-8, 18-23).

In this Galatians context Paul drew specifically from Isaiah 54, a passage in which Zion (Jerusalem) is called upon to enlarge her dwelling place in view of the atoning self-offering of Yahweh's Servant (53:1-10). As Yahweh's covenant "wife," Zion was to bear children for Him, but she became a harlot who bore only unfaithful children out of her own harlotry (cf. Ezekiel 16, 23; Hosea 1:1-2:13). Thus Yahweh stripped Zion of her children and sent her away (50:1), but He also promised to restore her to Himself and give her an abundance of children (ref. 49:14-21): *In her restoration, the formerly barren Zion would bear more children for the Lord than she had when she was in her previous married state (54:1-3).*

Zion's restoration to bear a multitude of covenant children was to result from the work of the Lord's Servant, and Paul recognized that this promise had been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

- By virtue of Christ's self-sacrifice, Yahweh was gathering to Himself a covenant household drawn from every tribe, tongue and people. Just as the prophets had declared, Jerusalem – *sacred space* – had been restored and was gathering in all the nations to worship and serve the living God.
- But this restored, eschatological "Zion" is *spiritual*; it is the "Jerusalem above" which bears spiritual children for God – children of promise, not of the flesh. In contrast, the physical city of Jerusalem is earthly and natural; it corresponds to Hagar and continues to bear children of the flesh appointed for slavery (Galatians 4:21-26).

*Paul recognized that Isaiah's prophecy of Jerusalem's restoration in the eschatological kingdom had been fulfilled, and not in a physical recovery of the physical city in the land of Canaan, but in the recovery of sacred space in Christ which Zion represented all along. The New Jerusalem – focal point of the fulfilled kingdom of God – is already established and bearing her children.*

- c. This truth is reinforced by the author of Hebrews. In seeking to encourage his Jewish-Christian readers to hold fast to the faith they had received, he reminded them of the fact that the Old Covenant Judaism they had left was of no value because it was merely preparatory and pedagogical. In coming to Christ, they hadn't come to God like their forefathers at Sinai: terrified and commanded to stay away under the threat of death. That encounter, which formally initiated Israel's life with God, had effectively defined their relationship for the duration of the theocracy. No, by coming to Christ in faith, these Jews had come to the new *heavenly Jerusalem* – the heavenly Mount Zion that is the true city of God. **They had come to realized sacred space:** the spiritual realm of true intimacy with the living God, His Christ, and His saints (Hebrews 12:18-24).

The New Jerusalem exists in the present precisely because the "*consummation of the ages*" has come (9:26). Christ has ushered in the kingdom of God as the prophets promised, and all the nations are now streaming to His holy mountain.

2. The present existence of “eternity” is perhaps best demonstrated by considering the Bible’s conception of *eternal life*.

a. The Fall introduced the principle of *death* (that is, comprehensive estrangement between Creator and creation that has resulted in the destruction of sacred space), which became the defining characteristic of the created order leading up to the coming of Christ. For this reason, the promise of recovery from the effects of the Fall was the promise of *life out of death*.

- This began with the protoevangelium in the Garden. Eve’s deception had brought death to the creation, but God promised to restore life through her seed; in that way, Eve was the mother of all the living (Genesis 3:14-20).
- That germinal representation of creational renewal as life out of death saw development first with Seth’s birth, then with the Flood event, and then by God’s perpetuating His promise of a seed by opening barren wombs.
- Later, this principle was pictured in God’s delivering Israel from the “death” of bondage in Egypt to bring His “son” into the “life” of covenant union with Him in His sanctuary land (ref. Deuteronomy 30:11-20).
- By its unbelief and disobedience, Israel chose death rather than life, and the day finally came when the covenant nation was driven away from God’s presence (cf. with Genesis 3:22-24). But this desolating “death” was attended with the prophetic promise of future restoration back to life (Ezekiel 37) – not the symbolic, temporal “life” of the former theocratic kingdom, but the authentic life of spiritual and creational renewal.
- This life was promised in connection with the coming and work of Yahweh’s Servant and the establishing of His everlasting kingdom (cf. Isaiah 11:1-12:6, 35:1-10, 53:1-55:13, 59:1-61:11; etc.).

b. So it is that when Christ – to whom all the Scripture bore witness – came into the world, He spoke of Himself as the One who was bringing *life* to God’s estranged creation. This theme is particularly pronounced in John’s gospel: Christ uniquely possesses life (1:4) and He gives life to the world (5:21, 6:32-35). He imparts this life to men through their faith in Him, and it is a life that is *eternal* – that is, ultimate and consummate (5:21-24, 39-40, 6:27-54, 11:20-26, 17:1-3).

The life that has come in Christ is eternal, not because it endures forever, but because it is the divine life that is uniquely suited to God’s image-bearers (5:19-26). And because “eternal” speaks to the *nature* and *quality* of this life, it doesn’t begin at the point of the believer’s death. All who have embraced Christ in faith already possess this authentic life that marks the eternal state; they have passed from death to life (5:24). All they await is the consummation of eternal life in the vanquishing of mortality when the perishable will have put on the imperishable.