

God Has a New Address

By Bobby Schuller

Today we're talking about this very important New Testament theme written by Jews for Gentile Christians. This understanding, Peter talks about it, we're going to see it in a minute, but Paul talks about it, too, that we as the church make up the temple of God, the living temple, or another way to see it is that you are a temple. That everywhere you go, your body, though imperfect, though you don't do everything right, that you carry within you the real presence of Christ that people need. That wherever you go when you enter into a room, in a strange way, the Biblical idea is that you bring heaven into the room with you. And most importantly, that the people who are in that room need what you have. They need what the Lord has instilled in your heart.

And my hope is that today you'll understand that very often when we go through suffering, when we go through difficult times, when we're mistreated, when we're lied about, when we lose things, that although the enemy is trying to destroy your life, he's taking a risk because he knows something not all of us know. That when the enemy attacks you, or takes something away from you, or puts you down, or rejects you, God can use that to make something new in your life. The worse the thing is

that you're going through, the better the outcome that your life can become as a disciple of Christ, as long as one thing doesn't happen – as long as you don't give up. As long as you don't walk away. As long as you don't turn your back on God.

And let me give you some more good news. Even if you do, there's still a pretty good chance God's going to turn it around. See He's such a good God. The Bible says even when we're faithless, He's faithful. That He'll carry you through what you're going through.

So the first thing I want you to take today is some encouragement. God is going to do something good in your life. I love the C.S. Lewis quote that goes something like this. I don't have it in front of me, but he says when we enter into the kingdom of God, when we become disciples of Jesus, imagine that your life is almost like a living house, and God comes to start working on it, and He does some things that need to be done. He fixes the leak in the roof. He cleans out the gutter. He starts to mow the lawn. But then all of a sudden He starts to knock down walls and pull things out and dig things in the ground. He puts a new floor up and all of a sudden a wing goes up over here, and a huge dining hall goes over there, and it hurts so bad and you cry out to God why is this happening, and C.S. Lewis says because from the beginning, He wasn't trying to make you a little bit better house. He's in the work of making you into a palace because He intends to live there. He intends to live in you. And in order to turn you into the palace that you'll become,

sometimes you have to go through tough times that will develop you into who you're going to be. Who you're going to be is so important, not just for you, but there are key people in your life. It might be your kids. It might be your colleagues. It might even be your enemies who have a total turnaround in the way they view the world because of something you did for them, or some way that you influenced them in your life.

One thing I had to learn when I first came to faith as a teenager, I'm kind of glad that you guys can't see this version of me because although on some ways I was a nice guy and I think I was a loving person, I was uber, very, very strict. And actually some good teaching and good understanding of scripture helped me find freedom in understanding both the importance of justice and morality, but on the other side finding freedom in grace, loving people just as they are, and even having probably a lot of grace for myself. I think a lot of my strictness came from shame about things I'd done or ways about feeling I didn't fit in and all these types of things, and so I used to be kind of harsh.

I remember, though, learning in ministry as I've developed as a pastor, I've learned that one of.. this is where I'm going to get in trouble, okay? Send your letters to Chad Blake. I've learned that one of the best ways to see people come to know the Lord is to give them ministry jobs. Let me say that again: I learned this when I was 16. So when I came to faith, I just started preaching the gospel to kids in my school, and I

always wanted to go to the roughest people, and one of the guys I went to, we'll just call him John, he's our drug dealer in our school. And I was like I'm going to win John to the Lord.

So I talked to him and he was like that's amazing! I was like you need to give your life to Christ. He's like okay, what do I do? I was like we'll pray right now. And he's like awesome. And this guy began following me around like my little disciple, honestly, and I had this club on campus; we'd have worship and we'd pray together, and this guy, we'll call him John, was following me around. And I remember about a week after he was doing this he started preaching the gospel to someone. And I was like this is amazing! I'm like John is preaching the gospel to this guy.

Later that day, I walked out to see him and he was selling crystal meth to another student behind the school. And I was like John, what are you doing? And he's like I know, I know, he said I still have a lot of stuff I got to sell, but once I'm done, I'm done. And I was like John! I was like really torn. I was like you can't preach the gospel and sell crystal meth. And he's like I know, I know, I know. And that was like one of these moments where I was like what do I do with this? Do I like tell him you're not a Christian? And maybe that is the right thing, but I will tell you what God did in his life. I watched that over time as that school year went on, he totally got clean, he totally repented from that kind of life. He

was a huge encourager, and the guy even went on to be a chaplain in the Navy. He just was an awesome guy, but it took some time.

See I hear so many testimonies from pastors who were on drugs and then they got saved and it's like they were this legend like overnight. I guarantee if you were that pastor's mom, or brother, that story might change a little bit, like well he dabbled in.. he went to church a little bit, he went because there was a girl. These are the parts of the stories that nobody tells; that very often, it's not an overnight thing, that there is a process. And very often we think I need to get everything right, I need to fit the profile, and then I can do ministry, but very often God's like just get out there and do stuff and watch as you be a temple, as you be a garden of Eden, as you be a source of inspiration, encouragement, life and love to others, I'm going to do a good work in you. And isn't that what the gospel is? We belong before we believed. We're saved by grace and not by works.

And I can tell you that if you wait until you're perfect to help your neighbor, if you wait until you're perfect to pray for someone that's crying, if you wait until you're perfect to reach out to your neighbor and help them, you're never going to do it. We have to understand that right now, even though we're flawed and we're not totally sanctified, and we've got these things, whatever it is, maybe you've got skeletons in your closet that need dealing with. Maybe you have some addiction you're working on. Maybe you have something you just don't know. You struggle with

doubt or whatever. Don't worry about it. Begin to minister to other people. Allow God's grace to fill you and I believe if you really do care about those things, but you continue to work on God's behalf, He will work through those things with you when they're needed to be done.

There have been other examples. Like I remember when we had a worship team and there was a bass player that was really good at bass, but he was very outspokenly not a Christian but he wanted to play bass for our worship band. And I was like absolutely! Why would you say no to that? Of course you want him in church. Why would you say no to someone who wants to come to church? Who cares if he's outspokenly against it? Let the Lord decide. And I watched as that guy became a full blown gospel believing Christian. He was playing bass for the Lord. I thought that was great.

All of this to simply say if God can do it through them, He can do it through you. I want you to know something that the enemy wants to give you all sorts of reasons why you shouldn't pray with someone; why you shouldn't let your colleagues at work know you're a Christian. Why you should hide the fact that God's doing a good thing in your life. Why you should walk away from the faith, and especially why you can't do good things for God. You're too this or not enough that, that is the enemy! If I see anything in scripture, I see the Lord Jesus Christ looking at teenagers, broken people, thieves, the worst kind of people in society

saying follow me, and helping them and walking alongside of them to become the people they were called to be.

I want you to know God believes you can do a good thing in this broken and hurting world today just as you are. And I want you to know I believe that, too. I'm on your side and I believe that today, if you believe that by the cross and resurrection, not by my good works, the Holy Spirit is in my skin, I believe your whole world will change. If you remember that what the scripture says is true, that yes, we should pursue goodness and holiness and righteousness and do the next right thing, but also we have this responsibility; the spirit lives in us, not by our works but by the cross, just get out there and be that person. Just say Lord, I'm willing, and watch as God does something good in your life.

Now the scripture we're going to read today is from 1st Peter, and before I get to this passage, Peter says we're living stones, and we're going to be reading from 1st Peter chapter 2:4. Peter's an interesting guy. He wasn't always called Peter. He was originally called Simon. In Hebrew, Simon is pronounced Shimon. Everybody say Shimon. (AUDIENCE: Shimon) See its fun to have a congregation back again I can teach Hebrew and Greek again. Shimon, Simon, means here or obey. It's the same word that we use when we say the famous prayer the shema yisrael, adonai, hear oh Israel, the Lord our God.

So Simon means the obedient one, or it means the one who hears. And when I look at Simon's journey, Peter's journey, I look at my own

journey. I see someone who went from being a teenager who was pretty strict, to being someone who woke up in the morning to reach the outsider – to reach the people that felt they didn't belong. And I really see this happening in Peter's life.

When Peter is first called, well again he's not called Peter, he's Simon. When Simon is first called by Jesus, he begins to follow Jesus and all these other disciples come along, but Simon is not only the oldest, he's also the big brother of the group, and I think in many ways a part of his journey is struggling with eldest sibling syndrome. Anybody know what I mean when I say that? Anybody here an eldest sibling or have an eldest sibling? And a lot of older siblings have the same thing in common – they kind of feel like they co-parent the other kids; like they're the third parent. Like they're the ones who follow the rules and they're pretty straight laced. And the more kids there are, the more they're this way. Hannah comes from a family of six children. She's the only girl. There's five guys, and her oldest brother Samuel, who's an amazing man, for sure has, wouldn't you say elder sibling.. (HANNAH: especially when he was younger, yes) yes, when he was younger, kind of like he's like dad number two. He's the older brother. He's the one that keeps everybody in line.

This is how Peter is. Strict, Jewish, Hebrew of Hebrews. I think after the resurrection he still views himself as like a type of rabbi, in a way, very, very Jewish. And we see that Christ begins to develop in him

something new. This will be a quick review. I'm not going to dwell on this too long because I did a whole sermon on this, but when Jesus gives Simon a new name, Peter, He does it in this place Caesarea Philippi which is known to be the capital. It's like the Vatican of Pan worship, and Pan is one of the most vulgar gods in the Roman pantheon. It's the god of basically sex and procreation. This hole you see behind me here is a grotto. There's water inside of there. And this was called the Gates of Hades.

Now Hades in Roman literature is not a fiery place, it's a damp, wet underground place, and the belief was that Pan would emerge from the Gates of Hades and go to this place right next to it. This is called the Rock of the Gods where you would have a bunch of nymph statues and a Pan statue, and the most gnarly sexual stuff would happen here. Forgive me, but a mass orgy with animals and goats and I already told this sermon once, and this is like a once every ten years kind of sermon you give, so I'm already past my gross allotment that I can use in a sermon. It is interesting, though.

And this is where Jesus takes these very strict, straight laced Jewish boys, and where He asks Simon the question: who do people say that I am? And Simon says well some people say Jeremiah, some people say you're Elijah, other people think you're John the Baptist. And Jesus says who do you say I am? And Simon says you're the Christ, you're the Messiah, you're the Son of the Living God. And Jesus says to him blessed

are you, Simon, because this wasn't revealed to you by men, but by my Father in heaven, and He says on this rock I will build my church. What does that mean? He says you have been called Simon, but now you'll be called Peter. He actually says Kephas because its Aramaic, but you'll be Peter, and on this rock I will build my church. What does that mean?

Well forever Catholics have said this means that the Pope will build the church, an apostolic church. Maybe that's true. Protestants have said well it's that confession of faith that he said you're the Christ the son of the Living God, and on this I will build my church. But a lot of Biblical scholars.. can we bring the Rock of the Gods back up? They were literally looking at the Rock of the Gods. He said this rock. And many scholars believe there's a third option that He's telling Peter it's on this rock I want to build my church. I want you to go there! It's not about a person or necessarily a doctoral statement and both those things are still true in their essence, but what if it's this? I want you to go here. I want you to go where people are broken, and messed up and wounded, and trying all sorts of bizarre things in the hopes that they'll get their life right, or the hopes that they'll find some pleasure or meaning in life, or just get away from the worries and the fears of this world. They have no grasp of who they really are. Go there, Peter! Go to this rock.

And certainly Jesus did say that for many of us, and we see that Peter struggles still throughout the book of Acts with this whole thing. He kind of was like seems to want the gospel to be just for Jews and not for

people outside. There's a whole story with Cornelius where this righteous Roman soldier who loves the Lord wants Peter to teach him, but Peter kind of doesn't want to, and so God gives him this vision. And you just see that over his life, Peter learns that the gospel is not just for Jews, and it's not just for straight laced people, it's for people like this Roman centurion. It's for people that are at the cult of Pan. And the fact that Peter even ends up and dies in Rome, which is their New York City. It's THE city of the world. Its where all the power, all the influence, all the art, all the literature, it's in Rome, that's where he spends the rest of his life reaching Romans, influencers shows that I believe he changed and took on this mantle.

And my sermons almost over, so I should probably preach this text, but this is where this letter comes from. Peter is sitting in a Roman prison cell. It's probably drippy and wet, and he's probably hungry and he's an old guy, so he's probably got arthritis, and he's sitting on this stone, and he's penning this letter to all the churches in Asia Minor, which is modern day Turkey, and he's trying to encourage them because so many believers now are going through really, really hard times in the name of Jesus Christ. Because they refused to back down, they want to bring the saving nature and life of the Holy Spirit to hurting people around them.

Even worse for Peter, is Peter is overseeing the church in Rome, which is during Nero's day, has come under intense persecution. Nero,

many of you know the famous crazy emperor Nero, historians believe that he and his boyfriend Tigellinus, I don't know, they lit this fire, so he had this palace overlooking like basically tents and like it was just a bad neighborhood, but it was right in front of the palace, and he wanted to build his swimming pool there. So he lit this fire so that the idea was that all of this stuff would be cleared away, and then he could build his pool, but ended up burning like a third of Rome to the ground.

And when this happened, he blamed this little group of what he called the cult in the city, this new forming body of believers called Christians. He said it was them. They're the ones who did it. And he said they were three things. Number one: they were atheists because they didn't believe that Nero was god. Number two: they were cannibals because they would eat the body and blood of Jesus. And number three: they were incestuous because husbands and wives would call each other brother and sister. And because of this, Nero went on a rampage, and killed probably thousands of Christians in Rome through the most horrendous way possible. Some stories say that he would crucify Christians and then light them on fire to light the streets at night. Throw them to animals.

And so imagine you're Peter and this is your flock. These are your families. These are Roman people that you brought to the faith, or people you invited to come to Rome to do ministry with you, and you're like how do I handle.. it's hard to understand for a pastor. Pastor means

shepherd, the word pastor. Doesn't mean priest. It means someone who goes out with the flock to watch over them, and Jesus tells pastors a shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. A pastor lays down his life for his sheep. And Jesus is the great shepherd, but those of us who are in pastoral ministry feel a deep responsibility to protect and guard the people who are under our temporary care. And as a pastor, I can't imagine what Peter would have been going through, seeing children being tortured and killed for their faith.

It's in this letter that Peter writes, not only to his own church, but to all of the churches everywhere. There's multiple 1st Peter's that are written. And they're sent out to all these different churches, and he's telling them effectively the message of the whole letter is God's going to get us through this. He's going to carry you through, and never forget, and this is the message for us, guys: never forget that the enemy wants to keep you from becoming who you're supposed to become. The enemy wants to keep you from reaching the people you're supposed to reach. The enemy wants to get you into a place where you're so beat up and so messed up and maybe locked in self pity, or just grief and heartache, that you can't help people anymore. That is the perfect place where the enemy wants to get you.

But Peter is telling, I think even himself that God is going to use this to change everything. And he tells them you are living stones! Meaning like wherever you go, you are living stones. Let's read it: "as you

come to Him, the living stone,” that’s Jesus Christ, “rejected by humans, but chosen by God and precious to Him, you also are living stones and are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness and into His wonderful light.”

Peter wants those who are suffering to press on, to keep going, not for themselves but it will help them, but not just for themselves but for the people that need them. And again, this is what the Bible says. The Bible says that we’re like little temples. For a Jew, that’s a big deal. To say you’re a temple?

The temple imagery is rooted in the Garden of Eden. Did you know that? The Garden of Eden.. remember.. it’s interesting when you read Genesis, I think many of us as believers who have read the Bible our whole lives, we think the whole world was the garden, but it clearly isn’t in the Bible. In fact it says that when God created the world, that most of the land was kind of desolate, or maybe that just means the land in the Middle East, I don’t know, but that God placed, and it sounds small, a garden in that place. And it specifically says near the Tigris and the Euphrates. And Eden and the garden are different places. There’s a thing called Eden, and then there’s like a garden around it. It seems to sound like Eden is actually a water spring, or maybe a building or a house or a

place, but there is this thing Eden, and then there's a garden around it. And this is where Adam and Eve are placed, and they walk through the garden with God, and they're fulfilled and they're full of life, and they're doing all of this great stuff.

And then when they sin, they're cast out of the garden, and the entrance of the garden is guarded by a cherub with a flaming sword. When they leave, the whole world goes into chaos, but here's the crazy thing that we always miss. It seems to be that there are other people out there when they go. So take it or leave it, I don't know what the Orthodox teaching is on this, but the scriptures says this that when Cain, for example kills his brother Abel, he says to God, when God says you have to go to the land of Nod. He says I can't go out there. They'll kill me. Who's he talking about? They'll kill me. And God announces to them anyone who harms Cain will receive vengeance seven-fold. Then Cain marries one of them and has children with them. I don't know. All I'm saying is just take it or leave it, I think there is something special about Adam and Eve that may be unique from whatever is happening outside of the garden. And we believe that all of that gets washed away in the flood or whatever, but I think the special thing that Adam and Eve receive is the ruach – eternal life. From the second they're born. Ruach. Ruach is a Hebrew word that means breath, or air, or spirit. And God literally breathes into their nostrils His own spirit. And it's like instantly something very special happens to them.

When the temple and tabernacle are built, they parallel exactly the creation story. The creation story happens in seven days with seven speeches. The tabernacle and temples are both built in seven days with seven speeches. The priests are given the same commandment that Adam was given and Eve were given: to work and to guard the temple. The layout of the temple itself is full of Garden of Eden imagery. Can we have a picture of this one artist rendering? You can see all of the plants and things, the cherubs that guard the entrance to the garden. Eden itself at the center where the Holy Spirit flows, rivers of living water, and then the menorah itself is supposed to be a symbol for the tree of life, the thing that gives life to the whole earth.

And the principle of the temple is like the temple is like the Garden of Eden, or maybe the temple itself is like Eden, and what's around the temple is like the garden. In other words, these are places in a desolate earth that bring life and green and water and freshness and hope and growth and goodness. And that's what the temple in a Jewish context is supposed to be. When Peter and Paul say you are the temple of the Holy Spirit! It's literally like you're supposed to be these little temples that everywhere you go, there's like a blossoming around you. Life around you. Hope, encouragement, goodness. Don't let anyone try and convince you that you can't or shouldn't be just exactly that.

If you hear anything I say today, it's this: people need you. With all your imperfections and all your flaws and all your baggage and whatever

it is, join the club, we all have it. Some of us are just better at hiding than others. People need the hope that you have to offer. People need the friendliness, the kindness, the love, sometimes the confrontation, sometimes the honesty that you can bring in a loving and godly way. I think we are going to be so tempted as things go on in this world, and sometimes things will get harder, sometimes challenges will come, to focus so much on me, that we forget that there are people like sometimes it's just your spouse, sometimes it's your kids, sometimes it's your neighbor, and sometimes it's your enemy that we forget that these people may need you.

Now most of all, let me encourage you. Maybe you've messed up, maybe during COVID you fell back into some old coping mechanisms. Maybe you're feeling guilty about something you did or something you went through. I want you to know, not only are you forgiven, God is so proud of you. He loves you. He's on your side and He's doing a good work in you. And I want to encourage you and give you heart to remember; look at your hands for a moment, would you? Like literally look at your hands. These are the hands of Christ. You're not Jesus, but Christ's spirit is underneath the surface of your skin. Imagine when you pray for someone that the same authority of Christ, not by your righteousness, but by His righteousness, and not by your faith but His faith that when you lay hands on someone to pray for them, that it's like Christ Himself is praying for you. Isn't that an honor? What a privilege it is to know that

everywhere you go, you're like a temple that's like this Garden of Eden, it's just going to emerge around you. So much of it is actually just believing that it's true.

More than anything, I want you to know maybe you haven't made a decision and you don't have that life in you and you want it, I want to encourage you today to make a decision to follow Christ. I want you to know that God doesn't call perfect people. The biggest reason people leave church is because of some sin or something in their life that they're embarrassed about, and I always think that's so sad because the more you're struggling, the more lonely you feel, the more messed up you feel, the more you need to get into a good church community. So make that decision today.

But most of all, whoever you are, I want you to know God wants to use you today. In fact, I'm just going to believe that as you friendly folks here leave the church building, or when you turn off your TV set, or you turn off your phone or whatever it is that you're watching, that there's going to be an opportunity today or tomorrow to help someone to be the light of Christ to that person. And you're going to be strongly tempted to just go home and take a nap, or, continue on to Chipotle. That's what I would do. I'm a big Chipotle fan. But watch, if you allow the love and kindness of God to shine through you in that moment, how much you start to feel the Garden of Eden-ness, the temple-ness of your life.

It's weird, isn't it? We always want to feel it first, and then do something. But watch as you do the thing, you'll begin to feel and realize what's already in there: the spirit of God, directing your life to be a priestly people, to be a godly person, to be a change agent for people who are struggling. So proud of you. I'm so proud of you. God is so on your side. God is only good and always good. He is for you a hundred percent. He is behind you all the way, and I want you to know I am, too, and we love you.

Let's pray: Father, we thank you that you love us just as we are, not as we should be. And that you use us just as we are and not as we should be. And so Lord, I just pray that people here would not only believe in you, but believe that you live within them. Not only believe that you can do great things, but you can do great things through them. To not only believe that you are present, but believe that you are very real and very present within them. Lord, let that overflow. Let our cup overflow we pray, and Lord we love you so much, it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.