

Glory in the Church

Introduction

Here we are, as a congregation, gathered in the extended and refurbished Worcester Park Baptist Church building. The last time you were here, doing this, was March 2020, it's now September 2022. It's not quite 40 years in a desert, nor 70 years in exile but it is long enough for us all to have changed.

It's not so long to have forgotten everything that went before, and not so short to think that we can carry on as normal. It's somewhere in between. The building is different, it looks and feels it, we have all aged a little but I hope that we have not changed so much, there are familiar faces, new faces and absent ones too. Everything has moved along.

Today we come in

There are two verses that I wanted to draw our attention to today, from the Psalm and the Epistle.

Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, **that the King of glory may come in.**
(Psalm 24:7)

to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!
Amen. (Eph 3:21)

Today we came into this building, to remember God, to place God at the centre of all that we are and all that we do. We could have all met in the carpark, or a local park, we could have met somewhere else, but we didn't; we chose to come into this building to meet together.

Even if you are at home today watching online (health or circumstance preventing attendance), you too are with us. By the wonder of modern technology, you have come into the building with us, by video we are extending the reach and inclusion, you are in this too.

But it's not so much that we have come into this place but God has come into the life of the church.

Psalm 24 reads like a Psalm of ascent, meaning it could have been recited and sung by the Israelite pilgrims, as they made their way to the Temple in Jerusalem. You can hear the call and response nature of the Psalm.

I imagine the leader of the pilgrims as Jerusalem comes into sight, calling.

**³Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD?
Who may stand in his holy place?**

Then the following congregation, seeing Jerusalem, respond.

**⁴The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not trust in an idol
or swear by a false god.**

Eventually when they arrive, they remember that, it's not so much they, who come into the Temple who are important, but God.

'That the King of glory might come in.' God is with them.

When we get to the New Testament, it's a little different, the emphasis is not on the Temple in Jerusalem, but on the person and community where God dwells.

To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus

Two things we're reminded that God's glory is in the church and Jesus Christ.

God's glory is seen in the life of Jesus, a life centred by love. We Christians believe that the most accurate view of God is displayed by Jesus. God's glory was so demonstrably 'in' Jesus, that he was able to say with all integrity 'I and the Father are one', their being was so perfectly aligned. The Apostle encourages us **'so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,'** (Eph 3:17)

Through faith in Jesus, we enter his body 'the church' and he shares God's glory with us. God's glory is no longer simply in the Temple, a place for you to go and seek God. Nor is God's glory solely in Jesus Christ, now God's glory is in the Church.

What does this mean for us?

We find three places that the glory of God is in. The Temple, Jesus Christ and the Church.

The Church and Jesus Christ are so inseparably linked that we cannot talk about the church without reference to Jesus. The life of Jesus must be visible in the church, without the love of Jesus moulding the church, the church isn't the church. But because we believe in Jesus doesn't mean that this is easy, yet it does mean a window is open for God's glory, his love to come in. Or as the Apostle Paul explains elsewhere, Jesus died a cursed death, so that the curse of death mightn't linger overhead; instead we live in the light God's love, and blessing and begin to practice it in the world, won for us by Jesus.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, (Eph 3:20)

John Wesley explains the way that God's love and blessing blossoms within our lives.

Here is a most beautiful gradation. When he has given us exceeding, yea, abundant blessings, still we may ask for more. And he is able to do it. But we may think of more than we have asked. He is able to do this also. Yea, and above all this. Above all we ask - Above all we can think. Nay, exceedingly, abundantly above all that we can either ask or think. (John Wesley)

But what about the building, this new shiny, lovely, new building, it's important to all that we do. Practically, it's a place for us to meet all through the week, all our weekday and weekend activities have a home, so does the local community as it is a shared space, a space to reveal God's love and blessing.

Spiritually, there is something about a place dedicated to God, whether it be done formally or not. I believe that buildings absorb a feel of the activity that happens in them. Some buildings will send a shudder through you, others will offer an overwhelming sense of God. This building will be bathed in prayer, the sound of sung worship and the reading of Holy Scripture. There will be moments of Holy Joy and Sorrow and of life lived before God that will happen here and you'll know it.

Questions

What might it look like to be the Church of Jesus Christ in the new building on the avenue?

What is the most important aspect of our witness to the local community?

Now that we think of the Hub as a place for the local community, does it change our (mine and your) relationship to the building?