

SERMON DISCUSSION:

“THE PURPOSE OF PLACE”

ACTS 17:16-34

God made a physical world and placed humanity in Eden as a temple-like dwelling where they would cultivate creation and expand worship across the earth. Though sin derailed mankind's God-given purpose, the Lord Jesus has reunited believers to that purpose through his death and resurrection. Pastor Stephen Minter show us how church buildings are not merely practical conveniences but at least six things: (1) the place Jesus is found; (2) monuments to God's grace; (3) spiritual training grounds; (4) forward operating bases for the Great Commission; (5) beacons of renewed purpose; and (5) “dress rehearsals” for the new heavens and new earth. For this reason, wherever Christians exist throughout history, they build. Physical space shapes our worship, embodies our beliefs, and signals to a searching world that *here* is where Jesus can be found. The building is not God's dwelling, but a gift of God's grace to his people for their flourishing and the accomplishing of God's mission.

// GETTING THE MESSAGE

:: Why do you think Paul chose creation as a starting point in his address to the Athenians? What does it reveal about effective gospel communication to people with no biblical background?

:: Adam and Eve were called to live in the garden and extend its boundaries "*until the earth was filled with this garden-temple*". What does this imply about humanity's purpose? Our work in Christ today?

:: How does verses 26 and 27 capture both God's sovereignty and the tragedy of the fall simultaneously? What does this “seeking” and “feeling” look like today?



// GETTING THE MESSAGE

:: The Tower of Babel, the golden calf, and the Athenian altars are all cited as examples of humanity building "man-made mountains." What do these examples share in common, and what does idol worship reveal about the human heart?

:: The early church built dedicated worship spaces within a century of the apostles. What does this historical pattern suggest about the relationship between the gathered church and physical space?

:: Pastor Stephen said "*physical buildings and space have a way of shaping us.*" Is this true? How have physical places shaped your faith, for better or worse?

:: Church buildings are monuments of God's grace. The Apostle Peter calls believers "**living stones**" (1Peter 2:5). How does this metaphor connect to the monument-building impulse seen throughout the Old Testament?

:: You may have heard it said, "Church is a people, not a place." That is true. So why do Christians still build buildings in which to gather for worship?



// GETTING TO CHRIST

:: Scripture calls Jesus the "**last Adam**" (1Cor 15:45-47; Rom 5:12-21). How does Jesus succeed where Adam failed? How is Jesus building His church the fulfillment of the "creation mandate"?

:: Pastor Stephen taught us that the church building is "evidence that Jesus did win and is winning and will finally win." How does the Lord's ongoing, present-tense kingship shape the way the local church should carry itself in its neighborhood?

// GETTING TO YOU

:: Stephen gave six ways the church building serves the Great Commission (see above). Which of those resonates with you most? Which one challenges you to think or act differently?

:: The church is a "forward operating base" for sending. What would it look like for you personally to see your church not just as a place you receive from, but as a base from which you are actively sent?



// GETTING TO YOU

:: Paul says, "**If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home**" (v34). How might our approach to church gatherings change if we truly came to serve and celebrate others rather than to satisfy our own needs or preferences?

// GETTING TO OTHERS

:: How does the story of Boniface chopping down the sacred oak illustrate the confrontational nature of genuine gospel witness? What are the risks, and what makes them worth taking?

:: Paul engaged the Athenians in the marketplace "every day" (Acts 17:17). What are the everyday spaces in your life—neighborhoods, gyms, schools, workplaces—where consistent, unhurried presence could open gospel conversations?

:: Global missions is implied in the call to extend the garden-temple "to the ends of the earth." How are you personally participating in global missions? Where might God be calling you to greater engagement?

