

Where is the Ark of the Covenant?

Rick Blackwood: Well, hey, everybody. Amazing Grace, that's the kind of Grace our God has. Amazing Grace and He is also rich, wealthy in mercy. That's what we're going to be talking about in God's word. Go ahead and catch a seat. I want to take a moment to welcome all of our campuses joining us, live streaming with us today: West Kendall, Downtown, thousands of people joining us online. Palmetto Bay, give them a warm welcome. We're all glad to be tapped in together. If you're a guest with us for the first time today, I especially want to welcome you. We believe that you've not been brought here by accident. We believe that God providentially brought you here because He wants to speak into your life. He always does that through His word, so, let me kind of bring us up-to-date where we are. We are in a series in our study of the Gospel of John that we've entitled The Presence. It's not with a "T" like a gift, but the Presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. If you have your Bibles, I want to encourage you to open them to the Gospel of John, chapter 14 today. We're going to go back to that text, and I want to begin by reading from there and then read a parallel passage as well. IF you don't have a Bible, just look on the screen it'll come up there.

"Jesus said, 'And, I will ask the Father and He'll give you another Advocate to help you and to be with you forever.'" Verse 17, "'The Spirit,'" that is the Holy Spirit, "'of Truth. The world cannot accept Him because it neither sees Him nor knows Him, but you know Him for He lives with you and will be,'" where folks?

Congregation: In you.

Rick Blackwood: Yeah, He's going to be in you. We've been talking about that for weeks. With that in mind, listen to First Corinthians, chapter six, just listen to what it says.

"What? know ye not that your body," your body, "is the" what? The "temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you." Now stop right there and let me set things up today by sharing this with you. To begin with, my little wife Rhonda loves movies. She loves to go to movies. She loves to watch movies. In fact folks, I don't think I've ever met anybody who enjoys a movie any more than this girl likes them. Now, me on the other hand, I'm not really that into movies. I think there's too much of that attention deficit stuff you know going on with me, and so I tend to watch movies with Rhonda only, only because I want to be with Rhonda. Now, -

Congregation: Ohhh.

Rick Blackwood: Yeah, oh, yeah. But folks here's my point, that being said, listen, that being said, there are a few movies, there are a few movies that I actually love to watch. In fact, there are a very few movies that even though I've already watched that movie, I'll watch it when it comes on TV over, and over, and over again. How many of you have a movie that you do that with?

Yeah. Now, for me, one of those movies that I, even though I've already seen it, I'll

watch it every time it comes on TV is the movie "Indiana Jones," yeah, Raiders of the Lost Ark. How many of you have seen it? Yeah. Now, what I like so much about Raiders that even though the movie is fictional, right, a lot of the movie is actually Biblical, and by that, I mean, woven into the fabric of the movie, to the plot of the movie is Biblical fact and historical Biblical facts. One of those historical facts has to do with the lost ark, specifically the Ark of the Covenant. So, I want you to put your history caps on for just a moment because way back in the Old Testament of your Bible, in fact, the second book of the Bible, God made a promise to Moses. Listen to what God said, Exodus 33:14, it's on the screen. Listen.

"The Lord replied," He's talking to Moses, "'Moses, my,'" what's that next word?

Congregation: Presence.

Rick Blackwood: Say it like you mean it.

Congregation: Presence.

Rick Blackwood: West Kendall. Downtown, my what?

Congregation: Presence.

Rick Blackwood: "'Presence will go with you.'" "Then Moses said to Him," talking to God, "'God if your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.'" So, get, it folks, Moses wanted to know that God's Presence was going to go with them. In fact, Moses was saying, I don't want to go anywhere unless I know for certain that your Presence is going to go with me. Folks, what I love even more is that God wanted Moses to know that God's Presence was going to go with Moses. So, to assure Moses of God's Presence, God commanded the building of what was called, let me open this up, let's open this up in the next service, guys. God ordered the building, commanded the building of what was called the Ark of the Covenant. How many of you have heard of the Ark of the Covenant?

Here's what it was, the Ark of the Covenant was the designated place of the Presence of God. Every time Moses would see the Ark of the Covenant he would know that the Presence of God was with him. But, folks here's what I want you to understand, get this, the Ark of the Covenant was the designated place of the Presence of God Almighty. In fact, listen to what God said about the Ark in Exodus 25, God said this to the people, God said this to the people, His people: "There," specifically at the Ark of the Covenant, "There will I meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat." Where was the mercy seat? "From between the two cherubim which are upon the," what? Upon the what?

Congregation: The Ark.

Rick Blackwood: Upon the Ark. Now, just a little FYI here, the Ark of the Covenant rested in the Jewish temple and namely it rested in a room that was called, The Holy of Holies,

and this is sort of a mock-up of that if you will. Now, I want you to track with me because if you know anything about the Ark of the Covenant, you know at some point in history it was lost. Probably stolen out of the Jewish temple, and folks to this day, it's whereabouts is totally unknown. What I love is that in Raiders of the Lost Ark, there's an archaeologist by the name of Indiana Jones, played by Harrison Ford and he is desperately trying to locate, trying to find the Ark of the Covenant, to the extent that he ends up in fist fights over it, to the extent that he ends up in a pit full of snakes. Take a look. You'll get the idea.

Every night this week, I've been going to bed with this dun, dun, dun in my head. But, folks I love it because Raiders is high drama stuff. I love that movie, but listen, listen. The truth of the matter is this, the Ark of the Covenant which was the designated place for the Presence of God on the earth, at that time, listen will likely never be found. And, here's why. In fact, this is my proposition, this is what I want all of our campuses to go out the door with today. Here's why, it's because now there is a new place for God's Presence because folks, God has re-designated the place of His Presence from inside of a temple, from inside the Holy of Holies, to a place that is far more special than that old temple in that Holy of Holies.

You see, the truth is, the truth is folks, the Ark of the Covenants is not really lost. It's just been relocated. You say well, Rick if the Ark's not lost, and it's been relocated, and you know where it is, where can we find it? We're going to find out today as we go back to this series called Presence. By the way, let me warn you, today's going to come across like teaching than preaching. I say that because I want you to know you need to lean into this early in the morning so that you get it. I want to give you two thoughts today, as we unpack this. How many of you have your listening guides? West Kendall? Downtown? Here we go.

Two thoughts. Number one, the Ark of the Covenant is now in you. Christ Fellowship, I don't say that glibly. I don't say that tritely because you need to know that if you are a child of God, and by that I mean if you are an authentic follower of Christ, you need to know that inside your body is the new designated place for the Presence of the Almighty God. In fact, listen to what Jesus said in John 14 about the Holy Spirit. He says, "He," that is the Holy Spirit, "lives with you and is going to be," where?

Congregation: In me.

Rick Blackwood: In you, in your body. Now, again that was revolutionary thought because before this the Holy Spirit would only come upon a person to equip them to do something like Sampson, you know slaying the Philistines, David taking on Goliath, Moses leading ... the Holy Spirit would come upon a person and then He would leave. But, Jesus said, now the Holy Spirit is going to come upon you and not just upon you, but live in you in a permanent way. Folks, one of the things we've been learning about the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit is simply the Presence of the Almighty God. You know, some of you came up in churches when they brought up the idea of the Holy Spirit things got crazy, things got weird, things got bizarre so when you hear

the Holy Spirit all of those kind of thoughts come rushing back in. But, what we've been learning is scratch all of that because the Holy Spirit is simply the Presence of the Almighty God. Folks, here's what also we've been learning that Jesus tells us, the moment you trust Him as Savior, the Holy Spirit, that is the Presence of God, takes up residence in your body.

Everybody touch your hands, it's your body. The Presence of God has taken up residence in your body. Here's what that means about your body. Listen to First Corinthians. Here's what it says, "What? Know you not that your body is now," the what? The temple of the Holy Spirit. The temple of the Presence of God. Now, folks, stop there because the Bible just declared your body to be the new temple of God. Now, if we really want to understand the new temple of God, we probably need to understand the old temple of God, the Jewish temple of God.

Let's take five minutes to get that history into our heads, and to do that at all of our campuses, I want you to imagine this auditorium as the temple, the Jewish temple. By the way, it was far, far more massive than any auditorium that we have at Christ Fellowship. For starters, for starters folks, the Jewish temple occupied the entire northwest corner of the Temple Mount. It occupied the entire northwest corner of a man-made plateau. The foundation stones on which it was built measured 37 feet, these are solid stones, by 18 feet by 28 feet. Massive, massive stones. The entire complex was flanked by a continual wall of colonnades, porches, huge goliath, gargantuan porches all supported by these gleaming white pillars. It took 84 years to construct the entire temple complex. I want us all to lean into this because somewhere in that massive temple was the Ark of the Covenant which was the designated place for the Presence of God, but where was it?

Well, follow me here because as you moved to the central part of the temple, again which was massive, massive, massive, you would come to a rather obscure room. It was a room that was 15 by 15 by 15 foot, and this room was called The Holy of Holies. The holiest if you will of all holy places. You know why it was called the Holy of Holies? It was called The Holy of Holies because that's where the Ark of the Covenant rested which was the designated Presence of God on the earth. So, get it folks, the Presence of God was located in this massive temple specifically in a room called The Holy of Holies and namely right at the Ark of the Covenant, the Presence of the Almighty God.

Now, with all of that in your mind, write this down as A and B. Your body is now the temple of the God. Not only that, write this down as B, your spirit is now the Ark of the Covenant. I want you to put your thinking caps on because you have a body. Get everybody touch your body, yeah. Your body is that part of you that people can see. It's the structure of who you are. God says your body is now the temple. It is the main complex of the house of God, but you're not just a body are you, because inside of your body you also have a soul. Your soul from the Greek word psuche, the word we get psychology from, your soul is that part of you that can hope, that can think, that can dream, that can feel. Your soul is in effect the Holy of Holies, but follow me here because you're not just a body and you're not just a soul because

deeper within all of that as you move to the core of your being, you have what the Bible calls a spirit, from the Greek word pneuma.

Your spirit is that intangible, immaterial, everlasting part of you that connects you to God. That's your spirit. Now, folks here's what I love. God took His Presence out of the Ark, as it were, and He relocated it inside the temple of your body, specifically at the point of your spirit. That's why God says His spirit bears witness with your spirit. So, your spirit is, in effect, the new Ark of the Covenant which by the way folks, is far better than the old Ark of the Covenant and the old temple setup and here's why. At the threshold of the Ark of the Covenant, the Holy of Holies there was a veil and that veil was always closed. It separated man from the Presence of God. Now, mind you, God's Presence was in there, but God placed a curtain over His Presence and here's why, because you and I, because mankind we are sinners and God is sinless. We are unholy. God is perfectly holy. We are unrighteous. God is righteous, and so God put this barrier up between Him and us to remind us that we are sinners, that we are unrighteous, that we are unholy and that we don't really belong in the Presence of the Holy God.

In fact, folks, think of this if you were a Gentile, a non-Jew, you couldn't even come inside the temple. You couldn't even come in and worship with God's people. Listen, if you were a Gentile, you were quarantined to the outside of the temple. You had to stay outside of the temple in a place like this foyer that was called the Court of the Gentiles. Close those doors, guys. You couldn't even go in where the Holy of Holies were, where God's people were. There was a barrier, now you talk about being separated from God, that was the Gentiles. Now, stay with me because if you were Jewish, you could come into the temple, and you could worship with all God's people, and you could celebrate with all of God's people. But, still yet, even if you were Jewish, you could not approach the Holy of Holies of God. Only one person could go inside the Holy of Holies and that was the high priest and he could only go in there one time a year to offer sacrifice, and he had to go in there and offer the sacrifice and get out lest God kill him.

So, there was this veil that hung in the temple, this barrier that reminded man of the separation between himself and God, that reminded us always that our sins put up a barrier between us and God. But folks here's what I love because when Jesus died on the cross for our sins, your sins, and my sins, and when He paid the price for our sins, and when He took away our sins, I want you to listen to what happened to that veil in the temple. Listen to this, Matthew 27, Jesus is on the cross. Listen to this, Matthew 27, Jesus is on the cross, listen to this: "And when Jesus had cried again in a loud voice, He gave up His spirit," He died. Now watch what happened, "At that moment, the veil of the temple was torn in two," say it with me, "from top to bottom." Folks, I love that. God didn't tear the veil down from bottom to top, He tore it down from top to bottom, that is from Heaven to earth, from God to mankind. It was like God was saying, no more curtains, no more barriers, no more separation between people and my Presence, and listen, for all of us who have embraced Christ as our Savior, we now have free access to the throne and Presence of God.

In fact, folks, what I love is after Jesus died, the temple was destroyed and the Ark of the Covenant has been lost forever. You want to know why it's not found? Because if people ever found this thing, do you know what they'd do with it? What would they do with it? Worship it, build an idol to it, so God destroyed it. God took His Presence from the Ark of the Covenant and put it in your body. Your body is now the temple of God and He put His Presence specifically at the level of your spirit so He could get as close to you as He possibly could. Your spirit is now the re-designated place for the Presence of God and your spirit is in effect the Ark of the Covenant, and you are now the Holy of Holies. You've been made holy.

In fact, listen to what the Bible says about you in Colossians one, I love this verse. It says, "What, you were," what?

Congregation: Alienated.

Rick Blackwood: You were alienated, once you couldn't get beyond the barrier. You were separated from God, but now He has reconciled you through Christ's physical body through death and here's how He's going to present you to God. How is He going to present you? Holy in His sight. I don't know about you folks, but I'm not holy, but I've been made holy. Practically, I'm not holy, but positionally in Christ God sees me as holy. Not only does He see me as holy without blemish, that is without sin, and without accusation. So, you have been made holy, a holy place to hold the Presence of the Almighty God. Now, can I share one more thing about the Ark of the Covenant? I know I've been beating this to death, but can I just share one more thing with you about it because God designed the Ark of the Covenant so that it would be the place of His Presence on the earth. What you may not know is that God designed the Ark of the Covenant to be a mirror image of His throne in Heaven. I want you to see what God's Presence looks like right now in Heaven.

Listen to Isaiah, the Bible says, "In the year that King Uzziah died "I saw the Lord." By the way, any time you see the name Lord in your Bible with upper case L lower case ord, that is reflective of God's Hebrew name Adonai which means the Almighty God, so he's saying, I didn't just see God, I saw Adonai. I saw the Almighty God, "high and exalted seated on a throne," that is the mercy throne of Heaven, "and the train of His robe filled the temple." Now watch this, "Above Him were," what? Seraphim, we've talked about seraphim before. There are three orders of angels: living creatures, cherubim and seraphim. Cherubim and seraphim are synonymous. I've always told you angles are the most powerful beings in the world. In the Old Testament, one angel, not even a cherubim, not even a seraphim slew 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. That's more people than both nuclear bombs dropped on Japan killed. One angel. Angels are not naked, fluffy, haloed people with a little bow and arrow. To see one is a trip into the supernatural. To see one would freak you out if you ever saw one.

These angels hover over the Presence of God. Watch what they do. "Above Him were the seraphim, each with six wings." Why six wings? "With two they covered

their faces." Why? Because they are exposed to the full Shekinah glory of God Almighty. When God takes on appearance it's light, blinding, piercing, penetrating light so they have to shield their faces. "With two they covered their feet." Why? God said to Moses, Moses remove the shoes from off of your feet because the ground you stand on is what? Holy ground. So, they cover their feet and it just says "And with two they were flying. And, they were calling to one another:" these two seraphim, "'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.'" It's this antiphonal thing. It's like one seraphim is over here and he shouts to the other "Holy, holy, holy is God;" the other seraphim is over here and he shouts back to the other, "Holy, holy, holy is God," and their wings stretched forth to protect the holiness of God, and they protect the holiness of God for eternity. They were doing it before you were born. They'll do it tonight when you're sleeping. When you get up tomorrow, they'll still be shadowing and flanking the glory of God and declaring God's holiness.

That's God's throne in Heaven. I want you to look at the Ark of the Covenant. God says this: "'And, they shall make an ark of shittim wood, two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof. And, thou shalt overlay it with pure gold within and without shalt thou overlay it, and shall make upon it a crown of gold around about, ... and thou shalt make two cherubim of gold ... in the two ends of the mercy seat. And make one cherub on the one end, and the other cherub on the other end: even of the mercy seat," which was reflective of God's throne, the seat of mercy. "Shall ye make the cherubims on the two ends thereof. And the cherubims shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be." Now watch this, "And thou shalt put the mercy seat above the ark; ... And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark ..." of the Covenant.

Now, folks, I love this because what we discover is the entire temple complex was a mock-up of Heaven. The temple itself, the entire complex mirror imaged Heaven with all of God's people worshiping. The Holy of Holies depicted God's throne room where God resides. The Ark of the Covenant depicted the Presence of God, and the mercy seat between the seraphim, between these two cherubim, was indicative of God's throne, the seat of mercy from which mercy throws. God said I will meet with you and commune with you from between the cherubim.

Folks, the entire Ark was the place of God's Presence on the earth. You say, so what? Folks, the so what is this, you are now the Ark of the Covenant of God. God's Presence on earth is now in you. You are now the temple of God. God's Presence is now in you. You are where the throne of God rules from you are where the mercy of God is seated. All of that is now in you, and so folks this is how I want us to flesh this out. This is how I want you to take this home today.

Write this down as number two. I'm going to hurry here. Live like the Ark of the Covenant that you are, specifically write this down as A, B, and C. Be aware of

God's Presence within you. The Lord replied to Moses, my Presence will go with you. "Then Moses said to Him, 'if your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.'" Listen, child of God, you never have to say, God make sure your Presence goes with me. It's a given because you are now the re-designated location for God's Presence on the earth, and folks here's the collateral from all of that. Not only does God's Presence go with you to your workplace, to your school place, into the hostile environments that you may find yourself. Not only does God's Presence go with you, but listen, the same angels that flank the glory of God, the holiness of God in Heaven, those same angels flank you now wherever you go. Yes! They are there to serve you. You don't talk to them, you don't pray to them, but they flank you wherever you go.

You see, listen, listen, child of God, when you pray, when you pray you call all of Heaven to your aid. You call God Almighty to your aid. You call the Son of God to your aid. You call the Holy Spirit of God's Presence to your aid, indeed you are even able to call the angels of God to your aid. Live aware of the Presence that surrounds you. It makes a difference when you're aware of it.

Number two, or B. Write this down as B. Be aware of God's holiness within you. I want you to put your thinking caps on for a moment because any time the Ark of the Covenant was moved it had to be moved with great reverence, great reverence. In fact, there was only one group of men who could move it. They were called the Levites. How many of you have heard of that? Levites. They were the only ones who could carry the Ark of the Covenant. In fact, folks, when they carried it they could not touch it, at all. In fact, if you read in the Old Testament, there was a man named [Uza 00:32:11] who accidentally touched the Ark of the Covenant and God struck him dead. So what God did was, God put rings on the Ark of the Covenant and He told the Levites when you carry it, pick it up with staves that run through it so that you don't touch it.

Brother, could you come up here just for a minute. Yeah, come on up here. He has no idea this was coming. What's your name?

Paul: Paul.

Rick Blackwood: Huh, Paul. We are now Levites, all right? I want you to grab that end, let's move it. The Levites carried the Presence of God with them when they moved it. No, child of God listen, you are now a Levite. You carry within you the Presence of God. Carry it with holiness. Carry it with reverence. Be careful where you go because where you go this goes with you. Remember that little song be careful little feet where you go, where you go. Be careful little feet where you go for the Father up above is looking down in love. Be careful little feet where you go. Be careful because you're carrying the Presence of God Almighty with you. You are a Levite of God. That's why the Bible says, thanks Paul for your help. Let's give it up for Paul. Listen this is why the Bible says, First Corinthians, listen, "Flee from sexual immorality." Run, take the Ark and run. Why? "All other sins a person commits are outside of his body, but whoever sins sexually, sins" the word against is Eis in the Greek e-i-s, literally into

his body. In other words, you're sinning now at the level of the Ark of the Covenant, that God who is within you.

Then he says, "Do you not know that your bodies are," what? "Temples of the Holy Spirit who is in you which you have received from God." Be aware of the holiness that you carry with you everywhere you go.

And, then finally C, write this down. Be aware of God's mercy within you. I love what it says about the Ark of the Covenant. "And thou shalt put the mercy seat above the ark ... And there will I meet with thee and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims, which are upon the Ark of the Testimony." That was the Ark of the Covenant. Now listen to what Hebrews says to you and me, "Let us then approach God's throne of," what? "Grace with confidence, so that we may receive," here are the key words, say them with me, West Kendall, "That we may receive mercy and find Grace to help in our time of need."

You know what goes with us everywhere we go? The mercy seat and the Grace of God. Let me give you a definition of Grace and mercy. I've done this for you before, you've got to write this out longhand because I don't have it in your notes, but it's a good thing because I want you to remember it. Here's what Grace is, Grace is when God gives us what we don't deserve. Grace is when God gives us what we don't deserve. What do we not deserve? Forgiveness, compassion, kindness, gentleness, that's all Grace, Heaven. That's all Grace. Don't you love that song Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, whoa, I was once lost, but now I am found. Was blind, but now I see. That's Grace.

Here's what mercy is, the mercy seat, mercy. Grace is when God gives us what we don't deserve. Mercy is when God doesn't give us what we do deserve. Mercy is when God doesn't give us what we do deserve. What do we deserve? Punishment. What do we deserve? To be banished. What do we deserve? To be forsaken by God. We don't get that. What do we get? Forgiveness. Don't you love the Bible that says God is rich in mercy? I think sometimes we think that, "Oh no. Maybe I've sinned so much that God has run out of mercy with me." Do you ever feel like that? Let me see your hands. Yeah. Maybe we all do at some point. You know, you feel like, "Oh, I bet God's not going to have mercy on that."

The Bible says that God is rich, wealthy, the one thing God does not run out of is mercy. Do you know what that means? That means no matter how many times you blow it, no matter how many times you mess up there's plenty of mercy of God to cover you. That's what the mercy seat was all about. Now that doesn't give us a license to go out and live like hell, but it does give us the confidence to say, "God, when I blow it when I mess up, I can rest. I can have peace in my heart knowing you are rich in mercy and you're rich in Grace and I will rest in that."

Now, I have to close with this because maybe you're here today and perhaps you're not a Christian. You're not a believer, and again, we're so glad that you've come

here, but you need to know that we are all sinners. Me, you, and what happens is our sins separate us from God, right? They quarantine us off from God, and so without Christ right now, you're separated from God. You'll be separated from God in this life. You'll be separated from God in eternity, but when Christ died on the cross, He paid the debt for your sins. He can now have the power to take away all of your sins which then allows you access to God, which then allows you to do your life with the God who made you. There's something in you. There's something in all of us that wants to live and do our life with our Maker. But, you need a Savior to take away your sins, to open up that curtain so that you and God can get together so that God can give you everlasting life. That's what He wants for you, to love you, to care for you, to give you everlasting life. I'm going to ask all our campus pastors at all of our campuses to come forward now at your campus.