

There are many convergent pieces that shape our understanding of Christ's ministry in the heavenly Sanctuary, each piece contributing insight and detail. All this depth is fascinating but often confusing. Let me offer you a phrase that accurately summarizes every detailed piece of the doctrine, "***In other words, God wants to be with you!***"

Fundamental Belief #24: Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary

There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle that the Lord set up and not humans. In it Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross. At His ascension, He was inaugurated as our great High Priest and, began His intercessory ministry, which was typified by the work of the high priest in the holy place of the earthly sanctuary. In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry, which was typified by the work of the high priest in the most holy place of the earthly sanctuary. It is a work of investigative judgment which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin, typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. In that typical service the sanctuary was cleansed with the blood of animal sacrifices, but the heavenly things are purified with the perfect sacrifice of the blood of Jesus. The investigative judgment reveals to heavenly intelligences who among the dead are asleep in Christ and therefore, in Him, are deemed worthy to have part in the first resurrection. It also makes manifest who among the living are abiding in Christ, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and in Him, therefore, are ready for translation into His everlasting kingdom. This judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus. It declares that those who have remained loyal to God shall receive the kingdom. The completion of this ministry of Christ will mark the close of human probation before the Second Advent. (Lev. 16; Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:6; Dan. 7:9-27; 8:13, 14; 9:24-27; Heb. 1:3; 2:16, 17; 4:14-16; 8:1-5; 9:11-28; 10:19-22; Rev. 8:3-5; 11:19; 14:6, 7; 20:12; 14:12; 22:11, 12.)

In other words, God wants to be with you! The heartbeat of the sanctuary message is a desire. The persistent desire of God to be with you. Let's start with an incredible insight from Hebrews 7.

Hebrews 7:22-25 This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

In this passage, describing Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, we see a connection between his ability to save and his ability to live. Hear this one more time, "he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." Let it sink in. His saving is proportionate to his living. That is good news for the one who needs saving because Jesus is good at living. Because he lives forever, he can save to the uttermost. He lives forever and is, therefore, unstoppable at saving! And the saving

is in the context of drawing near to God. We get saved in proximity to him and we are saved for the purpose of being with him. Jesus is always living for us so that we can always live with him. God never stops working to bring you to him. His continual occupation is to make a way for you to be with him. ***In other words, God wants to be with you!***

Drawing near to God is a main idea in the teaching about the sanctuary in the book of Hebrews. The Greek word (προσέρχομαι- proserchomai) that is translated "draw near" in verse 25 is used 7 times in the book of Hebrews (Hebrews 4:6; 7:25; 10:1; 10:22; 11:6; 12:18; 12:22). The first 4 of these occurrences are in the context of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. There is another word (ἐγγίζω- eggizó) that is translated twice in Hebrews as "draw near" (Hebrews 7:19, 10:25). The first of those occurrences is in a sanctuary context as well. A central part of the message of the sanctuary is "drawing near to God". ***In other words, God wants to be with you!***

To better see this sanctuary theme of God wanting to be with us, we will proceed through a timeline, stopping at 10 sanctuary moments throughout history. We will begin all the way back at creation.

Sanctuary Moment: Creation of the World

God created people for relationship. He placed them in a sanctuary called the Garden of Eden. Not only was it a beautiful sanctuary (Genesis 2:8-14) but it was a place where God was with his people (Genesis 3:8).

The details of creation are innumerable from the construction of every atom to the placement of every star. Yet God was not so preoccupied with the details that he was too busy for the creatures he had just made. We could debate the age of the earth or what it meant for God to create *ex nihilo*. But we would have to be careful not to forget the main point of creation. ***In other words, God wants to be with you!***

Sanctuary Moment: Fall into Sin

But humans sinned. Their sanctuary was compromised. Their sin separated them from God. The fall is a sanctuary moment, but not a good one, except that God responds in a way that preserves the possibility of a sanctuary.

Genesis 3:22 Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever..."

Wait a minute, doesn't God want us to live forever? Isn't that why he went through all the trouble of dying for us? Yes. Only, he doesn't want us to live forever with the sin that separates us from him. God was unwilling to perpetuate this separation by allowing sinners to live forever.

So, as a strategy to restore their relationship, God kicked humans out of the garden and blocked their access to the tree of life.

Genesis 3:23-25 Therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

God strategically kicked humans out of the garden to restore the possibility of an eternity spent with his people and did not settle for an eternity of separation. **In other words, God wants to be with you!**

There are many details to sort out concerning the fall. What does this mean for human nature? Is there better support for the infralapsarian position or the supralapsarian position? There are questions about why God would create such a tree and allow such a possibility. Couldn't God stop it? Why didn't he? At the end of the most insightful answers, you will conclude... ***In other words, God wants to be with you!***

Sanctuary Moment: Earthly Sanctuary - 1446 BC - 70 AD

Adam and Eve's kids grew up. Things got really bad. Bad in the sense that God was not with his people as he wished to be. God sent a flood. A remnant spread out and repopulated the world. God called a man named Abram and set apart his descendants. It was all part of God's plan to be with his people. Abram's family was to be a blessing to the world to draw them close to God. A few generations later that family moved to Egypt to survive a famine and not long after that they became slaves. Egyptian slavery wasn't a good environment for spiritual growth. But God still wanted to be with his people. After 400 years of that, God had enough, and he raised up Moses to lead an exodus from Egypt. It was during this Exodus that God reintroduced his idea of a sanctuary. It wasn't Eden but it had the same purpose, for God to be with his people.

Around 1446 AD, God gave his people the Ten Commandments and a bunch of other instructions, including intricate details for how to build a tabernacle.

Exodus 25:1-7 The Lord said to Moses, ²“Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me. ³And this is the contribution that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, ⁴blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, goats' hair, ⁵tanned rams' skins, goatskins, acacia wood, ⁶oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, ⁷onyx stones, and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breast piece.

In other words, God wants to be with you! Oh yes, that is the point of all of this after all. As he reminds us in verse 8, “And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.”

He commanded them to make it exactly like the pattern he showed them (Exodus 25:7). There was a pattern because there is a heavenly sanctuary. God was telling them to make a replica (Hebrews 8:5). The earthly sanctuary and the heavenly sanctuary could not share the same level of glory, but they did share the same purpose, so that God could be with his people.

The sanctuary continued as a literal place where God would meet with his people and a symbolic testimony of how God would carry out his plan of redemption to be with his people for an eternity without sin. After the erection of the Wilderness Tabernacle, the ark remained transient until the completion of Solomon's Temple around 957 BC. There on the temple mount, the very spot God had provided a sacrifice when Abraham was about to offer up Isaac, was a permanent, magnificent structure, depicting the plan of salvation and the ultimate substitutionary sacrifice.

The presence of God in the sanctuary is portrayed in some intense ways. There are "flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail." (Revelation 11:19). David proclaimed, "Awesome is God from His sanctuary" (Psalm 63:2). It is a place where God hears and receives his people (2 Samuel 22:7; Psalm 18:6; 1 Kings 8:27-30). It is a place of worship where worshipers have meditated on God's unfailing love (Psalm 48:9) and have beheld His power and glory (Psalm 63:2). The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle, and the people could see God's presence there evidenced by a cloud during the day and a fire during the night (Exodus 40:34-38). God was enthroned between the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant. He gave a special intensity of his presence above the Mercy Seat in the Most Holy place of the sanctuary. (Exodus 25:22; Numbers 7:89; 1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 2:6).ⁱ This presence of God with us is the point of the sanctuary. The physical sanctuary facilitated his real presence, and it also symbolized a plan for how God would bring us more fully into his presence. **In other words, God wants to be with you!**

Study the furnishings and the dimensions of the sanctuary. See how they point to Jesus. Learn how they illustrate the plan of redemption. There is meaning in the material, and the numbers and the placement. And that meaning is, **in other words, God wants to be with you!**

Sanctuary Moment: Fall of Jerusalem - 586 BC

Another fall marks another sanctuary moment. The Northern Tribes of Israel fell to the Assyrians in 721 BC. The Southern Kingdom of Judah remained in Jerusalem until Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city and took the people captive in a series of sieges in the 590's and 580's. The sieges intersected with the story of the sanctuary in 586 BC when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Solomon's Temple.

2 Kings 25:8-9 In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month—that was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon—Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. And he burned the house of the Lord...

2 Kings 25:13-14 And the pillars of bronze that were in the house of the Lord, and the stands and the bronze sea that were in the house of the Lord, the Chaldeans broke in pieces and carried the bronze to Babylon. And they took away the pots and the shovels and the snuffers and the dishes for incense and all the vessels of bronze used in the temple service.

The details of the sieges are quite a lesson in history. And the questions that immerge could be debated for a long time. Why did God allow it? If God wants to be with his people, why send them into captivity? Just how many sieges were there and what happened during each? Study the details and chase down the questions and you will arrive at a familiar conclusion. ***In other words, God wants to be with you!***

The fall of Jerusalem was an act of Judgment from God. Judgment is a major element of the doctrine of the sanctuary. And God's judgment is redemptive. God disciplines those he loves (Hebrews 12:6). ***In other words, God wants to be with you.***

Jeremiah 32 describes a graphic scene. It was the 18th years of Nebuchadnezzar, the temple was destroyed in his 19th year. Jeremiah was prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem and God's intentions of using Nebuchadnezzar a tool of judgment. King Zedekiah didn't like what he was saying so he had him imprisoned.

After Zedekiah scolded him for his prophecies against Jerusalem (vv. 3-5) Jeremiah prophesied something new (vv.6-15). He was told by God to buy a field. God was illustrating a hopeful and redemptive message.

Jeremiah 32:14-15 I charged Baruch in their presence, saying, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware vessel, that they may last for a long time. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.' Imagine the scene. Jeremiah is in prison by his own people. Just outside of the wall are the enemy armies that are soon to destroy the temple and the city. The people are starving. And God assures them that his purpose in all of this is to bring them back.

God spoke again of the certainty of judgment by the hand of Babylon and the great sin of his people (vv. 26-35). Then he said (vv. 37-41), "Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation. I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety. ³⁸ And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. ³⁹ I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. ⁴⁰ I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. ⁴¹ I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul."

God's purposes in judgment are redemptive. ***In other words, God wants to be with you!***

The fall of Jerusalem is not the first fall. There was the fall from the garden. In that judgment God was acting to secure a future with his people. The flood was a judgment. Why did God do that? He was preserving a remnant from a wicked world so that he would not lose all his people. The slavery in Egypt was a judgment. In every judgment God is working for a future in which he can be with his people. When you see apocalyptic graphics portraying Bible prophecy you can tell yourself, "In other words, God wants to be with you." That is the message we should take from judgment. In judgment God does not intend to scare you but to be with you. He is not trying for intimidation but invitation.

The message of the sanctuary includes a long-debated message of judgment. We should take note that in all these sanctuary moments, when God does the work of judgement, he is working to bring us closer to God. This is the intention of every phase of judgment. In the investigative judgment that Christ is doing now in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary, Christ is removing sin and declaring us cleansed so that we can have a future of being with God.

As a result of the fall of Jerusalem, many were taken captive to Babylon. Among those was a boy named Daniel. Daniel was given the gift of prophecy. He was shown the future of the kingdoms of the world, the future of Jerusalem, and also the future of the heavenly sanctuary.

He heard a voice asking how long the sanctuary would be trampled (Daniel 8:13) and he heard the reply, "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed." (Daniel 8:14).

Daniel would have loved to have known when the earthly sanctuary would be restored. God told him when the heavenly sanctuary would observe the Day of Atonement, doing the work of judgment to remove sin so that God could be with his people. The answer made Daniel sick because he didn't understand it (8:26-27). If he had understood it, he might not have been encouraged because it would be a long time before the sanctuary would be cleansed, 2300 years. But then, if he had understood it, he might have concluded something like, ***in other words, God wants to be with you!***

Sanctuary Moment: Decree to Restore Jerusalem- 457 BC

Daniel learned that the starting point for the time prophecy was the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (Daniel 9:25). That was a sanctuary moment on two counts. First, there was a decree coming to restore Jerusalem. Second, the date of that decree would provide the time of the cleansing of the sanctuary.

The decree to restore Jerusalem was given in 457BC (Ezra 7:11-28). Restoring Jerusalem was an act of God calling his people to be with him. They were coming back home. They would rebuild the temple. It also began a timeline for a greater act of reunification between God and man.

Now the details concerning the date have been debated as there were multiple decrees recorded in Ezra. And of course, that is only the start date. So, if you don't subscribe to the year-day principle you may start in the same place but end in a very different place. Again, there are so many pieces that we should check out for ourselves. But whenever we come to a point of confusion or disagreement, we can go back to what is certain. ***In other words, God wants to be with you!***

Sanctuary Moment: 1st Coming - 4 BC-31 AD

The story of Jesus living among men and dying for them is the central example of God's desire to be with us. Jesus was born, Emmanuel, God with us. Some two decades before the birth of Christ, Herod had begun the reconstruction of the temple. Jesus declared that one greater than the temple had come. That one was him.

Christ lived the sanctuary for us. He died as our sacrificial lamb. The symbolism of redemption in the sacrificial system all pointed to Jesus. But the sanctuary ministry of Jesus continues beyond the cross. With his death the veil in the temple was torn. Then he rose and ascended as our high priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

Hebrews 10:19-22

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Christ's first coming ushered in a new covenant. One in which God opened greater opportunities for intimacy with himself (Hebrews 10:16).

The deeper we venture into the details the more we see of how the first coming of Christ makes a way for us to be with God. Jesus accomplished so much in his short time on earth, both in the physical world and the spiritual realm, living for us as fully God and fully man. If any point of the study of incarnation gets you confused, as it has throughout church history, remember this, ***in other words, God wants to be with you!***

Sanctuary Moment: Cleansing of the Sanctuary - 1844

The first coming of Christ secured the offer of salvation but it did not bring an end to the story of redemption. We are not home yet, and Christ is not done yet. Since the time of Christ to this day, sinners have found salvation through faith in Jesus. But there was progress to be made toward the final sanctuary experience with God. The next step in that progress happened at the end of the 2300-day prophecy.

In the 1830's, a group of people took note of the prophecy and came to some exciting discoveries. Daniel 8:14 includes a time element (2300 days) and an event (the cleansing of the sanctuary). William Millar found prophetic significance in both of these. Fueled by Miller's lectures, the 2300-day prophecy launched an advent movement.

Miller understood the 2300 evenings and mornings to be 2300 literal years. He found that the starting date for the prophecy was given in scripture. The prophecy was to start with the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (Daniel 9:24) which was in 457 B.C. (Ezra 7:1-27). Miller knew that whatever the cleansing of the sanctuary was, it was going to happen at the end of this time prophecy, which he calculated to be "about the year 1843."ⁱⁱ

But what was going to happen? What is the cleansing of the sanctuary? Miller understood it to be the second coming of Jesus. It was a well-considered conclusion. Miller found seven different possible identities of the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14. After reasoning that 5 of these 7 either didn't need cleansing or no longer existed he concluded, "There are but two things more, which may be called a sanctuary, which may, or ever will require cleansing; and those are the Earth and the Church."ⁱⁱⁱ He then asked the question, "When will the earth and the saints be cleansed?" He concluded that they would be cleansed at the second coming, the earth by fire and the church by translation.^{iv} He put all that together and arrived at the conclusion that Jesus would return about the year 1843.

The advent movement spread and as it spread, they did some more careful calculations and found that 1844 was a more accurate date. After a series of small disappointments some advent believers saw the connection of the cleansing of the sanctuary and the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16) that takes place on the 10th day of the 7th month. In 1844, that worked out to be October 22. They believed that Jesus was coming, and that the Bible told them when!

But Jesus didn't come on October 22, 1844. Believers responded in different ways. Some abandoned the advent hope entirely. About 75% of those Millerite Adventists who did maintained their advent hope, including Miller himself, came to believe that nothing of spiritual significance happened on October 22, 1844. However, they kept their faith in the second coming. They believed that the event was right (the Second Coming) but the date was wrong (it didn't happen in 1844). These became known as Mainline Adventists. The other 25% of those who kept their advent faith became known as Bridegroom Adventists. Some of the Bridegroom Adventists believed that both the date and the event were right. Jesus really did come on October 22, 1844. He just came spiritually. These became known as the Spiritualizers. Still another, minority group of Bridegroom Adventists believed that the date was prophetically significant, but the event was wrong. They believed in the soon coming of Christ but not in 1844. Something else happened on that date.

Well then, what was the event that happened in 1844? Among these Literalizing Bridegroom Adventists were James White, Joseph Bates, and Ellen Harmon, pioneers of what would later become the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. They and others in this minority group came to the

belief that on October 22, 1844. Jesus entered the Most Holy Place of the heavenly Sanctuary to begin the high priestly work of the Day of Atonement.

This is worthy of deep study. The details of the prophetic interpretation need to be personally verified. You should spend time with Leviticus 16 to understand the Day of Atonement. You should review the timeline to see how we arrive at this date. You should consider what it means to be living in a time of pre-advent judgment. And as you do you will find, ***in other words, God wants to be with you!***

Sanctuary Moment: Questions - 1980

There has never been a time, since 1844, that the interpretation of the early Adventist pioneers has not been challenged. Discussion of the Investigative Judgment made its way into the 1888 debates about righteousness by faith. The emergence of last generation theology introduced some frightening aspects to the doctrine. But most notably, the doctrine was questioned in the 1970's and 80's with the challenges brought forward by Desmond Ford. In 1980, the general conference updated the fundamental belief statement regarding Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. ^v

Ford's questions met with an echoing buzz from church members around the world. Many left. Some concluded that the doctrine was not important. Other planted themselves more firmly on the side of the historic interpretation, asserting that the sanctuary message is the distinct feature of Seventh-day Adventist theology. Some discredited the historical interpretation of prophecy and the year-day principle. Along with Ford, people questioned the interpretation of the prophecies of Daniel. Did we really get all those dates right?

Most importantly, people questioned if the Investigative Judgment was compatible with the gospel. Ford stated, "The doctrine of an Investigative Judgment that began in 1844 denies the finality of the Cross, God's omniscience, and the reality of saving faith."^{vi}

People saw the pre-advent judgment as a fearful prospect as if God were requiring perfection and merit-based salvation and actively flunking those who couldn't make the cut. The idea of standing alone without a mediator was emphasized to mean that Christ would not keep his promise to never leave us or to ever live to make intercession for us.

The sanctuary message is not anti-gospel, but it affirms the very heart of the gospel. God offered himself as a sacrifice and intercedes and judges so that he can be with his people.

There are so many more details we could cover. Imagine, the document presented by Desmond Ford at Glacier View Camp was 991 pages long. We haven't considered the views of Robert Brimsmede. We could debate the meaning of the Greek term, ta hagia, in the book of Hebrews. But in that study, we would have to be extra careful not to blur the point of the whole thing. ***In other words, God wants to be with you!***

Sanctuary Moment: 2nd Coming - Soon

With his first coming, Christ came to us. At the second coming he will take us to himself. As 1 Thessalonians 4 declares, "and so we shall be with the Lord forever." The second coming is a sanctuary moment. Christ went into the Most Holy Place in 1844 and he will come out at the second coming. His work of Investigative Judgment will be through. And he will gain what he has been working toward since the fall; he will be with his people without the separation of sin.

It will be a sanctuary experience during the 1000 years in heaven. Then when the New Jerusalem descends, the sanctuary will be fully restored.

Revelation 21 and 22 describe the sanctuary.

Revelation 21:3 Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

Revelation 21:22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

There will be no sanctuary because the very atmosphere we live in will be filled with the presence of God.

There are many details we don't know about the coming of Christ. We have signs but no date. We have descriptions but we have not experienced anything like it. But we know that he is coming for us. ***In other words, God wants to be with you!***

Sanctuary Moment: Today

The most important sanctuary moment on the timeline is today. We are given the choice to live with God today. He stands at the door and knocks. In other words, he wants to be with you. He lets us decide what to do with the door. Just look at the history of God's detailed plan and persistence to be with you. His plan has been executed perfectly and yet he still gives you the choice. Right now, God is living to intercede for you! He is doing all he can so that you can draw near to him! With such an overview study we skipped a lot of details. But the general point of the sanctuary is clear. ***In other words, God wants to be with you!***

i This paragraph was originally part of another sermon by Pastor Ryan. Find that study here <https://pastorryanrogers.com/cleansed-part-1-2/>

ii Miller, Apology and Defense, 19

iii William Miller, Letter to Joshua V. Himes, on the cleansing of the Sanctuary (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1842), 7,8.

iv Ibid., 9-14

v Find more on this study at <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=7FOL>

vi Desmond Ford, *The Investigative Judgment and the Everlasting Gospel: A Retrospective on October 27, 1979* (N.p.: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016),