



GATHERED

The Empowered Presence of God's People

TEACHER NOTES & DISCUSSION GUIDE

SESSION TWO: **All the King's Men**

A Study on the Church by



SMYRNAFIRST
BAPTIST CHURCH



Session Two

All the King's Men

Introduction

J.M. Barrie created the character of Peter Pan in 1902. He was originally a half-bird, half-boy who had magical abilities. The character was used as the center-piece for Barrie's stage-play "Peter Pan: The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up". Peter Pan is limited only by his own imagination, is full of self-confidence, and inhabits a literal dream world where his whims become reality. Peter has become a cultural staple, nearly ubiquitous around the world. There is something fantastic and delightful about an endless childhood. The concept of eternal innocence, precociousness, and mischief appeals to our imaginations as it well should.

But there is also something terribly sad in the character of Peter Pan. While he has eternal childhood, that means he can never grow up. In order to stay in Neverland, Peter is doomed to never remember a lesson he has learned or the people he comes to know and love. The brilliance of the character is in this trait. In order to stay a child, he can never grow; not emotionally, mentally, experientially, or historically. While it brings fearlessness and an endless sense wonder, it also means that the wonder is never realized.

God has created us for more than mere wonder and imagination as an end to themselves. In fact, God has created us to be growing all the time. The threat of growing old to Peter Pan was that he would lose the wonder. But for the people of God there is no such threat. When we grow in maturity, we also grow in wonder because God is an endless well of surprises and imagination. There is no way for us to out-dream him. We will be surprised at the depths of his goodness and glory for all of eternity.

It is for this that God has called us to himself. He makes us his people so that we can grow old with him; eternally old and coming to full maturity, yet also full of wonder. He is the center of our "Big God" theology. He must be. As his people we must orient ourselves to look to him for everything and train ourselves to center our thinking, living, and practice on who he is and what he says. To be the church requires nothing less.

Let's look together at how God's presence marks our existence as the church.

I. Created for His Fellowship

A. Man was made to be in intimate fellowship with God. We are not meant to be alone in any respect.

1. Adam

- a) Even as God created man in the garden he declared it was "not good for man to be alone" (**Genesis 2:18**). This didn't mean God himself wasn't enough for him. It meant that God's purpose in created image-bearers was not yet complete. In order to show his full glory through his creatures, he must make male *and* female, each with a specific purpose and role. God wants us to be in community with one another. But as his people he wants far more than human community for us. He wants us to be with him.
- b) God places Adam in a perfect place in perfect relationship with Eve and in perfect communion with himself. Yet in this perfection there is one command of prohibition. Don't eat from that one tree. Eve and Adam did not obey and as a result were cursed and cast out from God's perfect place and presence. The consequence for their sin was clearly articulated, on the day you eat of it you will surely die. And while they did die spiritually, God showed mercy by covering their naked shame with animal sacrifices. Blood for sin. God's grace is clear as

he restrains his just wrath toward these rebels and instead takes the life of an animal in their place, covering their naked bodies as a sign that he will provide for them. Even as they leave his presence, the whisper of their offspring rings in their hearts, knowing that one day there will be a man to crush the serpents head. God desires to be with them. He made them for this purpose and his plan is to redeem them to himself that he might love them forever and that they might worship him forever.

2. Noah

- a) It doesn't take long for the world of man to descend so far into wickedness and sin that God actually is sorry for making them (**Gen. 6:6ff**). But among the wicked, he finds Noah and his grace falls upon him. Noah feared the Lord, but that isn't really the reason God chooses to save him. Noah proves many times in his life that he is no perfect man. God simply looks upon him with favor and saves not only Noah himself, but his entire family. Again we see that God desires community for man with one another and with himself.
- b) He puts them inside the atonement of his ark, a vessel of salvation through the waters of judgment and brings them out safely on the other side. They are commanded again to fill the earth. God is making a people for himself out of the rebelliousness that had come to characterize the whole of the human race; out of sin, a people.

3. Abraham

- a) A promise is given to Abraham that from him, all the families of the earth will be blessed (**Gen. 12:1-3**). This is the first note of the extent of God's plan to redeem. We think of the Old Testament being about Israel, and it is. But we fail to see that Israel is just the beginning. From this people, all people would find the blessing of God. Throughout Abraham's life, this promise bears itself out. Even those that are brought into Abraham's house from outside find the blessing of God. This is the prototype of God's redeemed people from every tongue, tribe, and nation. And through their deep sin and rebelliousness, he loves them every step of the way and brings them to himself.

4. Moses

- a) God delivers his people from the bondage of slavery through his servant Moses. Another man who in his own power and authority would seem unimpressive and unqualified. Yet God raises up this murderer to be the mouthpiece of another extraordinary work of grace and frees his people from the bondage of a king who imagines he rules the entire world. But when push comes to shove, Pharaoh realizes that his rule and authority are nothing compared to the might, power, and glory of the King of Heaven. Out of bondage, God brings his people to himself. He says to them, "I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God." (**Exodus 6:7**)

- 5. Through every generation there is sin and rebellion, and through every generation God pursues his people. The **judges** can't rule so God fights their battles. The **kings** forget God and chase the earthly standard, but the Lord raises up faithful men. The **priests** are often godless and yet God persists in forgiveness of their sin. The **prophets** are murdered for speaking his words, but their testimony stands and their words come true one night in a Bethlehem stable.



6. Jesus himself will come preaching the kingdom of God. He will call a people to himself and they will come, but you see his heart for those who refuse as he laments over the unbelief of Jerusalem. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (**Matthew 23:37**) Look at his love in the face of persecution, hatred, mocking, and murderous desire.¹

B. The heart of God always beats for his people. He longs to be with them.

1. But because of the great sinfulness and rebelliousness of mankind, we cannot come to him. Instead, he must take action and bring us to himself.
2. We see this in the way he describes his people both in the Old and New Testaments. We aren’t earning our place with him, he is setting his delight on us.

II. Chosen for His Pleasure

A. A Physical Nation of Promise

1. Israel emerges as God’s chosen people and they dominate the story as the focus of God’s mercy and rule. The kingdom of God is quite literally taking shape in the function of Israel. Yet, God’s kingdom isn’t the dim shadow behind Israel. Israel is the shadow of the real thing to come. God is making a kingdom in heaven that will include *all* his people. He chose Israel but he is clear that he did not choose them because of anything inherent in themselves. **God’s choice is not based on Israel’s merit.**
2. **Deuteronomy 7:6-9** “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. 7It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 9Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations...”
3. The promise of God (his covenant) is the reason he has “set his love” on Israel. Notice also here that he has chosen Israel as a “*treasured possession*”. He doesn’t take them on begrudgingly. He covers them over with the blanket of his love and names them as his own. This is the extension of his love for man in the garden. He hasn’t forsaken them, but he loves them and treasures them. It is important we see that it wasn’t because of them. The reasons given all find their origin in God’s mind and actions. God is not compelled to love us, we are compelled to love him.

¹ While this isn’t discussed in the video lesson, Romans 9:21-23 is an excellent place to see how Jesus’ heart for Jerusalem is both heavy with desire and yet able to judge with swift and terrible wrath. Sometimes we tend to put God in a box that makes him seem like a beggar when it comes to salvation, wringing his hands and hoping someone will run under his wings. This isn’t the picture of God the Bible paints and it is important that we see his deep love for humanity, even sinful humanity, yet while his wrath burns against the rebelliousness of sinners. He is long-suffering, not a beggar.

4. The law and the prophets set the standard for God's people; God's promise makes the way. This is the story of the people of God for all eternity. In the old covenant we see God establishing the standard of our dwelling with him. It is perfection. **Leviticus 19:2** says, "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.'"² God continues this standard in the New Testament in **Matthew 5:48**, "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." So this standard doesn't change or become less strict over the years. What happens then? The difference between OT Israel and the NT church is the revealing of the fuller expression of God's redeeming purpose for his people in Jesus. This links the physical nation of promise to the more fully realized spiritual nation of promise.

B. A Spiritual Nation of Promise

1. Just as God chose Israel in the OT, so he chooses his people in the NT. Remember God's covenant with Abraham to bless the nations through him. The advent of the church in the New Testament is God's blessing overflowing the banks of physical Israel and fully revealing how God's people aren't just the nation of the circumcised, but includes all those who come to him through faith in Jesus. And here again we see that God's choice is not based on the church's merit.
 - a) **John 15:16** "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you...." Jesus could not be more clear here. We typically do not struggle with God's choice of Israel, therefore we should not struggle with God's choice of his church. This statement comes in the context of a discussion of the true vine which demonstrates the reality of God's relationship with his people and how it extends past simply being a part of national Israel, but that the nations can be grafted in and that faithless Israel can be cut off. God has not shifted direction with the church, but has simply expanded our view of his redemptive plan.
 - b) Likewise, in **John 6:37**, Jesus says, "All that the Father gives me will come to me...." This is the picture of the love between the Father and the Son and how God's chosen people play a part in that love. We are a gift from the Father to the Son! We have been carefully planned and selected as a demonstration of the Father's great love for the Son. His people are so precious to him that we become an expression of love to himself. In addition, this statement is made in connection with the "bread of life". In the wilderness, God supplied manna for his people to eat so that their life would be sustained temporarily. But in Jesus, we have the true bread of life that will sustain God's people for eternity.
 - c) **Israel is the beginning of God's redemptive plan for his people. The church is the fulfillment through Christ.** When we are able to see the thread of God's redemptive purpose for his people all the way through the Scripture, we are able to have a better view of his plan for us as the church. It connects us to the past and the future, showing us how God has anchored us in the ancient in order to carry us into the future.

² Notice the word "congregation" here. At the end of the lesson we will discuss briefly the assembly of God. That is the word used here. Qahal in the Hebrew text means congregation, assembly. In the NT it is translated "church" (ekklésia). So you can see the connection here between the congregation of the OT and the congregation in the NT. It's just important that you catch that thread between the two, so I point it out here for that reason.



- (1) **Galatians 6:14-16** "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which^b the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. ¹⁶ And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon *the Israel of God*." Here again we see the connection between the Old and New Testaments. Paul is discussing freedom from the law in the Spirit, warning the church not to equate salvation with law-keeping as was done formerly, but to center it on faith in Christ. He tackles circumcision here as well, saying that it is no longer the mark of the people of God. Rather, we must be *made new* and calls the church "*the Israel of God*".
- (2) **Romans 9:8** "This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring." God is making a people for himself not out of physical lineage, cultural heritage, or race, but because of his promise. Again, notice how this is rooted not in what we do but in what God is doing.

2. **The will of God is active for his people. He will not let them be lost.** God's choice is centered on his great pleasure to bring worship to himself. If anyone one of us attempted to talk this way about ourselves, we could rightly be called self-centered, vain, and narcissistic. However, we are not infinitely good and glorious like God is. If he doesn't set himself as the center of all creation's praise and worship, then all that is made would have no hope. Which brings us to the final point of God's involvement with his people.

III. Convened for His Worship

Here we are going to look at the places in which God condescends to dwell with his people. These places are holy places of worship throughout human history and there have always been such places. When you see these places brought out in Scripture, begin to see that they are not simply places that people go to tack on a religious element to the rest of their busy lives. These places are the goal of life and the end to which all life is moving. Worship of God is not an additive to the fuel of our lives, it is the engine itself. It is not a supplement or improvement to life, it is life.

- A. **Garden** - Eden is the perfect Garden to which God brings his created people and is the place where he interacts with them face to face. Of all the places in the world he has made, this is the place that is cultivated and kept, not wild and unconquered. This is the sanctuary from where man will execute God's plan to fill and subdue the earth.
1. **The place on earth where God dwells with his people**
- a) **Gen. 3:8** "heard the sound of *God walking in the garden* in the cool of the day" This indicates regularity and familiarity. This isn't a special trip God is making but the regular liturgy of life with man. He visits them.
2. **The place on earth where God's holiness intersects with his people**
- a) **Gen. 2:15-17** The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷*but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat^d of it you shall surely die*. This command sets the tone for the standard that God requires of his people. Since he is the eternal and sovereign creator, he can require anything of his people. This was the only prohibition in the garden and yet it proved too much for the creature. Wherever God is, there is also the standard which he requires of his people - perfect obedience.

B. Tabernacle - After the fall, God's people dwell in a land that is broken in sin, groaning for redemption and fighting against them at every turn. But God in his love and desire for his people packs up his tent and goes with them. The tabernacle is again the place where God intersects with his people.

1. The place on earth where God dwells with his people

a) **Exodus 35:21** "And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him, and brought the LORD's contribution to be used for the *tent of meeting*, and for all its service, and for the holy garments." This tent of meeting is the place where God's people come to worship him, to meet with him. It is modeled after heaven and is the center-piece of the entire early Jewish culture. Without the tabernacle, there is no central reality bonding them together as a people.

2. The place on earth where God's holiness intersects with his people

a) **Exodus 26:33-34** "And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the ark of the testimony in there within the veil. *And the veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy. 34 You shall put the mercy seat on the ark of the testimony in the Most Holy Place.*" Just as in the Garden, wherever God's presence is, so then is his holiness. It is who he is at his deepest part. The Ark of the Covenant contained the tablets of stone on which God had written his law. The Mercy Seat signified the holy presence of God and hovered above the Ark and the law. This holy presence is so potent in the fallen world that it must be separated from the people by a curtain, just as it was separated from them at Sinai by a fence and a cloud. What was once given freely to men in the garden will now utterly consume anyone who encounters it without a sacrifice of blood. But the tabernacle is a place of worship for nomads. People without a land.

C. Temple - The people of God have solidified as a national force under King David. He has put the enemies of Israel beneath his feet and has secured a place for the kingdom to finally have a throne of power in Jerusalem. He draws up plans for a fixed temple, the centerpiece of life in Jerusalem, which in turn is the centerpiece of life in Israel. David will not complete the temple, but his son Solomon will see it through to completion. And this temple again becomes the place where God comes to be with his people and display his holy standard. The holy of holies is still in tact, separated by the temple veil. Only the High Priest can go there once a year bearing the blood of sacrifice. The same two points are made. God is there with his people and his holiness is on display. The passage from 2 Chronicles pictures the corporate worship at the dedication of this place. It begins to look more like our modern worship with the singing and playing of dedicated musicians, and the ministry of the priests. God's holy presence is again displayed as a cloud as it is for Isaiah (Is. 6) and in the wilderness (Ex. 13:21).

1. The place on earth where God dwells with his people

2. The place on earth where God's holiness intersects with his people

a) **2 Chronicles 5:11-14** And when the priests came out of the Holy Place (for all the priests who were present had consecrated themselves, without regard to their divisions, **12** and all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, their sons and kinsmen, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and lyres, stood east of the altar with 120 priests who were trumpeters; **13** and it was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the LORD), and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the LORD, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever," the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, **14** so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.



D. The New Jerusalem - Solomon's temple lies in ruin, being erased from the earth. There is currently no physical location to which God's people can point. There is a place of worship between Solomon's temple and the new Jerusalem that we will see in a moment, but this is the final place of God's dwelling with his people and the place to which all of creation and history is going.

1. The final place where God dwells with his people

a) **Revelation 21:3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God." We saw this verse last week, but it bears repeating. This is the heart of God for his people - to be with them, to love them, to provide a final home and rest to them, to be the center of their worship. But where holiness always meant death, blood, and sacrifice, now see the effect of his holiness on his people.

2. The final place where God's holiness intersects with his people

a) **Revelation 21:4-5** "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." **5** And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Here then is the end of redemption, the goal to which all of God's people are going. This is the focus of the promise of Romans 8:30. God's people will be glorified, clean, sinless, holy - just as God is holy. God is making a people for himself and when his holiness comes to the final place of intersection with his people, the people find that they can stand unchecked before their God, having their tears dried. The brokenness of the world has been unbroken and worship is finally brought back to where God intended it all along - he and his people face to face.

E. The holiness of God is applied to his people. He will not leave them unclean.

Worship is the marrow of life. It is the aim of every heart's desire. And all the earth will worship one thing or another. If it is not the God of the Bible, it will be their own appetites or a false god. What the church must know is that God has not left us alone. Though his holiness sets him completely apart from his creatures, he redeems us and fits us to dwell with him in his perfection. He will not leave us unclean.

IV. The Assembly - One word about the assembly we alluded to back in Leviticus when it is mentioned as "the congregation". It is important to make this connection between the people of God in the OT and the people of God in the NT.

A. Hebrew for assembly - qahal This is the word used for congregation or assembly. It is also the word used for the Jewish Synagogue. Whenever God's people meet together, specifically called together by him for his worship, this is the word used. It is connected to the NT word for the same idea.

B. Greek for assembly - ekklesia (also translated church) The assembly of God's creation for his worship in the new testament is often translated "church". This is the continuation of the assembly throughout Scripture, but it is more fully realized as the nations now mix together with the Jews in the fulfillment of Abraham's covenant. This is the church of which we are now a part. See how Peter (nationally Jewish) explains our situation now that we are in Christ (who is the true Israel).

1. 1 Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. **10** Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

V. Final words of application

- A. **Because God created us, we cannot claim autonomy from his designs.** - We are creatures who follow the creators plans and designs, not the creators who decide for ourselves what we will be and do. Wherever we deviate from God's design we are in error and out of step with the standard.
- B. **Because God chose us, we cannot claim our own righteousness.** - We cannot claim that we deserve a place in God's kingdom. We are all sinful and rebellious. Our place with him is because of his mercy and we must bow down in worship and obedience in praise of this great gift.
- C. **Because God called us, we cannot claim our own standards.** - We are brought into his presence and are given the ability to stand in the midst of his holiness. He has made us priests and has through Christ given us access to the most holy place. This means we cannot simply do things the way we want. We must always measure our thoughts and actions, even our concepts of worship and the church, against what God has ordained for us.

God has not created us as Peter Pans, to always chase our own fancies and let our imaginations govern what we do. We all belong to the King. We are his. We must grow up into maturity and allow our wonder and imaginations to be driven and fed and governed by the endless wonders and imaginations of our endless, eternal, glorious, and holy King.



Session Two

Discussion Guide

USE AS MUCH OR AS LITTLE OF THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE AS YOU LIKE.

Introduction

In what ways does humanity behave like Peter Pan. Is it all bad? How should be different from Peter Pan?

I. Created for His Fellowship

How do we see God's desire for his people in his interactions with Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses? Does he deal differently with us today?

How does the promise of Exodus 6:7 inform how we should live our lives today?

In Matthew 23:37, we hear Jesus' heart for Jerusalem. Is this his heart for the whole world? Is Jesus helpless to bring his people to himself?

II. Chosen for His Pleasure

Deuteronomy 7:6-9 gives the explicit reason for God's choice of Israel. How does this inform our relationship with God?

How do the law and the prophets set the stage for Jesus?

In Galatians 6:14-16, why is it important that Peter calls the church "the Israel of God"?

What does the lesson mean when it says "The will of God is active for his people?" What is God doing for us?

III. Convened for His Worship

How do the places of worship in the past (Eden, the tabernacle, and the Temple) point us to the future? What do we learn about our worship today by thinking about the other places of worship he has ordained?

How do we show God's holiness in our own worship? What has he done for us that is different than the worship of the Old Testament?

What is the main difference between Old and New Testament worship?

IV. The Assembly

Why is there a link between the gathering of Israel and of the church?

What can we learn from the fact that the two are connected?

How does I Peter 2:9-10 inform our understanding of the Old Testament and how it relates to us?