

## Sermon- Being Church: Being the Temple of the Living God

Scripture: Eph 2:19-22

Sunday, July 19, 2020

This is the fourth and last sermon in the series on Being Church. We looked at metaphors of church such as “the Body of Christ”, “the Bride of Christ” and the spiritual family or “household of God”. Today I am going to address both the fourth and fifth metaphors, church as the “building of God” and “temple of God”. Because the building metaphor is a partial metaphor as it’s focus is only on Christ’s role as the cornerstone of the building. To see what the rest of the building is supposed to do we have to examine the next metaphor of church, the “temple of God”. So today we will tackle both metaphors, building and temple in sequence.

Let’s start with the building metaphor. Look for the word building as I read our passage today from Eph 2:19-22, ***“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit”***.

When you look at this passage, notice how it starts out by addressing its listeners as the household of God and then it turns to the metaphor of “the building”. It declares that **Christ** is the **cornerstone** of the building. And as you continue reading, it is as if the camera is zooming out and you see the **whole foundation**. This foundation consists of the **apostles and prophets**. And as you keep reading, the camera zooms out even further and now you see the whole building. And that is when you realize what the building is. The building is the **new temple** that Christ said he would build in three days.

And each **stone** in this temple is made up of the **rest of the spiritual family** of God. That includes the entire universal church. And this **temple** made out of stones representing each believer and covering the whole universal church is according to Eph 2:22 the “dwelling place of the Spirit of God”.

Ok so we know that the individual believers are the stones and the whole universal church being built is the new temple. So what exactly is a temple anyway? This term might be confusing to some people. Because we are used to using certain terms for places of worship for certain religions. It is Hindus, Buddhists and even Mormons who typically use the term “temple” for their places of worship. Muslims use the term mosques, Sikhs use the term gurudwara, which literally means “house of the teacher”. So what does Eph 2 mean when it says that the church is actually a temple? We will examine the meaning of the word **temple** in this context today.

Now as I say this some of you might have your minds going to this incident when Jesus was standing in the Jewish temple after he had driven out the money changers and Jesus telling the Pharisees, ***“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days”***. Of course the Pharisees had no clue what Jesus just said. But we know that Jesus was connecting the **Jewish temple** with the institution he was going to build after His resurrection, which is the **church**. So to understand the **functions** of the church you have to understand the **functions** of the Jewish temple.

So let me first summarize some important aspects of the Jewish temple that was originally built by Solomon. The first function of the temple Solomon built was to house the ark of the Covenant. This was where God’s presence is said to have rested. So the temple had to have a structure that represented the place where God’s dwells with human beings. The place God build where God and human beings dwelt together was the Garden of Eden. So structurally, the temple was designed with the same proportions of the tabernacle and had many motifs representing the garden of Eden. After all any

place that God is going to dwell has to be build to met the specifications given by God Himself. Heb 8:5 says, ***“They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: “See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain”***

So the purpose of the temple is to be the symbolic location where God dwells. So structurally it was build according to God’s exact design.

But it is not just the design that God specified, but also what happens inside. And the main activities going on in the temple were the sacrifices and offerings that were made to God there. Now there were four kinds of offerings so let’s review these offerings.

First the **burnt offerings**. These were the offerings that were burnt up completely so that God got all of it and no human being got any part of it.

The second where the **sin offerings**. In this offering the blood of the animal was offered to God, along with some parts of the animal and the rest was completely burnt outside of the temple.

The third were the **Reparation offerings**. These where if you cheated and confess or get caught, you would pay what you took plus 20% if you confessed or 100% if you got caught.

The fourth kind was the **fellowship offerings**. This offering was a voluntary offering given to thank God for something he has done. This offering was given some to God, some to the priests and some to the people.

Beyond all this there was the tithes that were of course given to the priests.

Beyond that where of course the teaching of God’s law that happened inside the temple and the celebration of the festivals.

So let's apply some key aspects of all these Jewish temple functions to the "new temple" the church.

I want to start by saying structurally, it is helpful to have this image in our minds of the universal church in which the Spirit of God dwells. This building starts with Jesus, followed by the apostles and prophets, and then much later each of us are also one brick in the wall of the new temple where God dwells. Now in the Bible chronology is always very important. Those who were before us, come first and later generations follow in order. When the dead are raised, those who died first are raised first and those who died later are raised in sequence of their death. So structurally we should know where we fit in the universal church. Each of us are a stone that is laid on top of the 2000 year long building history of the church. And there will be stones that sit on top of us in the years to come. That means we have to hold ourselves to that very high standard always imagining that we are a brick in the incredibly beautiful dwelling place of God. We have to also remember that this structure is according to God's design and so it has a beauty that we need to appreciate and respect.

Secondly, in terms of the function of this building I want to touch upon four aspects of the church as the new temple of God. Tithes, remembrances and offerings. (the Lord's Table, praise offerings and good work offerings. )

Let's start with the **tithes**. This is one aspect that has not really changed between the old temple and the new temple. The tithes are a proportion of your income and brought into the church to support the mission of the church. God set up this system in the old temple and did not change it in the new temple. The mission of the church has to still be carried out and the mission of the church is carried out as a partnership between the congregation and the vocational servants who are dedicated to the mission of the church. So the new temple is the place where the tithes of God's people are gathered.

The second new temple activity is remembering Christ's work on the cross by participating in the Lord's table. Yes, aren't you glad we don't have to sacrifice an animal here every day? All we have to do is drink the wine and eat the bread as Christ asks us to do to remember him and his sacrifice till he returns. The church is the only institution in the world that remembers Christ's sin offering on the cross by inviting its members to the Lord's supper. What a great gift and blessing! In a bit we will participate in this act together. Every Jewish festival was celebrated by people physically traveling to the temple. The church is where the people of God come to remember all the important things that God has done for us and one of the most important things we remember in church by celebrating the Lord's table is Christ's sacrifice for each of us.

The third new temple activity are sacrifices of praise. Heb 13:15 says this, ***"Let us, then, always offer praise to God as our sacrifice through Jesus, which is the offering presented by lips that confess him as Lord"***. I am sure you are familiar with this verse but have been wondering how does praising God amount to a sacrifice? Well when we look at the old temple activity of animal sacrifice, the ultimate intention of the sacrifice was to have our slate cleaned before God. The blood of animals would not actually wipe anybody's slate clean. But Christ's blood does that. For us in place of animal sacrifice we can simply remember Christ death and resurrection and our own cleaned slate and praise God for it. So for us the phrase "sacrifice of praise" does not imply that it is a big sacrifice on our part to praise God. No, phrase "sacrifice of praise" actually means the "praise" of the sacrifice or the "praise" portion of the sacrifice. If the sacrifice part is already done, then only the praise part remains. So instead of sacrificing we are simply called to remember and "praise God". Good deal right?

The fourth new temple activity is "doing good works". Heb 13:16 says <sup>16</sup>***Do not forget to do good and to help one another, because these are the sacrifices that please God.***

How is doing good works a sacrifice that pleases God? Well, it works like this. The purpose of the animal sacrifice was to wipe out one's sin and make one right before God right? So in the post Jesus era, when sin has been erased, one of the effects of it is that human beings can walk in the will of God and have restored relationships with each other. In other words, church people are freed from sin to live according to God's will. And "doing good and helping one another" is another thing besides "praise" that flows as a consequence of Christ's sacrifice.

So in place of animal sacrifice, what are the three things that happens in the new temple? Remembering Christ's sacrifice, praising God and doing good for others. These three activities are sacrifice substitutes in the new temple that greatly please God.

Remember friends each of you are a stone in the new temple of God, the universal church. And there are four things we do as a church because we are the new temple of God. We tithe, we remember Christ's sacrifice in the Lord's supper, we praise God and we do good works to help each other. 1 Peter 2:5 sums it up well, he says, "***Come as living stones, and let yourselves be used in building the spiritual temple, where you will serve as holy priests to [offer](#) spiritual and acceptable sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ***". May this community be a place where good and acceptable sacrifices of praise and good works reach all the way to heaven as a sweet aroma to our Lord. Let us pray.