

Read also 1 Kings 6:11-14, ch. 8. Check out the service, which is recorded on www.fpcd.org. All the Scriptures, prayers, and music in the service support and illumine the message of the sermon.

Steve read about the plans and building of Solomon's temple. This was the very first permanent temple that was built for God. God seemed a little ambivalent about it.

Actually King David, Solomon's father, had first thought of the idea of building God a house: David said, "I am living in a beautiful cedar palace, but the Ark of the LORD's Covenant is out there under a tent!" . . . But the LORD declared: You are not the one to build a house for me to live in. I have never lived in a house, from the day I brought the Israelites out of Egypt until this very day. My home has always been a tent, moving from one place to another in a Tabernacle. Yet no matter where I have gone with the Israelites, I have never once complained or asked them, "Why haven't you built me a beautiful cedar house?" 1 Chronicles 17:1-6

The Lord allowed Solomon to build a temple. Solomon knew it was inadequate; he knew the highest heavens could not contain God, much less a structure on earth. And so Solomon's plea in his dedication prayer, and God's own intention was that the temple would be a place where prayer and forgiveness happened. It would be a place where foreigners, or Gentiles, – everyone who is not a Jew – would be welcome, even invited to come to seek the One True God and pray, so that all the peoples of the earth may know God's name and fear Him. (1 Kgs 8:43)

People still make pilgrimages to cathedrals today to seek God, or to have a spiritual experience, or to find healing. Perhaps you have visited such a cathedral where miracles are acclaimed, or places known for moral or spiritual significance.

Two things happened at the temple. There was a court for the Gentiles so that all people can seek God. Secondly, people brought animals to sacrifice to receive forgiveness for their sins. We don't really understand the killing of animals in 2012. So to get the concept of forgiveness I want to explain it in a simple method used by an Old Testament scholar, Dr. John Goldengay:

Sacrifice is like a gift of flowers. The value of the flowers is not what makes the gift efficacious. Instead it is the spirit in which they are given. A husband may give his wife flowers for no reason, except she deserves it. Or he may be giving them because he unintentionally wronged her in some way, like forgetting their anniversary, or wrecking their car, or having a big fight. The flowers don't make up for the car or the hurt feelings (he still has to buy a new car and he still has to rebuild her trust), but they do say that he is sorry and they also help restore communion. In each case though, the key is whether or not the wife accepts the flowers.¹

The situation is similar with sacrifice. It's not the value of the sacrifice that matters, but the spirit in which it is given. Sacrifice could be for various reasons, but repentance and restitution were needed when sin happened between God and the offender. *In the end what mattered was whether or not God accepted the sacrifice*, which He would have, if it was done with a repentant, contrite

¹Dr. John Goldengay, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2005.

heart (Psalm 51:17). (We are not considering right now why the need for a blood sacrifice. We will talk about that on April 1.)

So the temple was a place of prayer and a place of forgiveness. But a tragic thing happened. Jerusalem was conquered and Israel's temple destroyed.

This brought a crisis. Where was God? Was He still with them? You see, they had begun thinking God was there simply because the building was there. They had forgotten that a building really could not contain God. In addition, they thought because God was there, bad things would not happen. So they didn't think it mattered how they acted, or whether they honored God or not. That's why they had laughed at the prophet, Jeremiah, when he confronted their disobedience.

Through the exile and destruction of the temple God was trying to teach them something.

God was giving them a more inclusive view of God. They experienced that God could be with them everywhere. God does not need a house. So when they returned to Jerusalem after the exile, Haggai told them to rebuild the temple and the people said why? We should just rebuild our own houses. But God had a reason so God said, *just obey me*.

Haggai also taught them that having God in your midst will guarantee some adversity in your life, because God will allow consequences to fall on us for our actions. Have you experienced that? It's God's discipline to help you grow up.

So we learn God is both with you and God also holds you accountable.

Well, the temple was rebuilt in 516 BCE, and the sacrificial system was reinstated.

But the same thing happened. Soon the people fell into not REALLY believing God was there because they brought sick and lame animals for sacrifice. But they were supposed to bring the best. They also began withholding their tithe.

See, your faith that God is REALLY here plays out in action, in giving and in obeying. So Malachi the prophet held the people accountable by asking – Will a person rob God? And they truthfully had to answer yes.

There is a tension in our relationship with God. God is with you wherever you are, and God also holds you accountable.

Malachi told the people this. It was a prophecy, “The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple.” (3:1) But he adds, “He is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap; he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness.” (3:3)

So Jesus came into the temple. Just like Malachi prophesied. By this time, it's the third temple, Herod's temple. And here's the story. READ Mark 11:15-19

Jesus is the Lord of the temple, you see, and it is His house. He entered through the Gentiles court, the only area they could go, and that is where the buying and selling was taking place. It would have been noisy and chaotic. Josephus writes that during Passover week 255,000 animals were sold. Worship and prayer would have been impossible for the Gentiles, thwarting God's purpose for the temple.

The people had fallen once again into disobedience. It's just a sin-problem we have. We would do the same. That is why, week after week, we have to come to God in confession – bringing our flowers, so to speak.

But look once again at verse 16. It says Jesus would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. **That means Jesus stopped not only the buying and selling, but also the sacrifices.** “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations. But you have made it a den of robbers.”

“Are you robbing God?” Malachi writes. Robbing God isn't only about money, but with blocking others out.

This made the chief priests and the scribes so mad they wanted to kill Him. They had forgotten the whole purpose of the temple. It was originally built with the knowledge that no building could hold God but God is everywhere. It was built so all people could come and seek God. It was understood that people are held accountable for their sin, and as they bring their sacrifice, they receive forgiveness.

Do you believe that? It is the core of your faith. God is here, and everywhere. Do you invite others to experience it? All are welcome to this house of prayer.

The Psalmist says: “You go before me and follow me . . . I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence!” Then he adds: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.” (Ps 139:5-7, 23-24)

Two things. God is with you. And, God holds you accountable.

Jesus' coming said things would change. Change was so hard for those church leaders. They liked the status quo. They resisted Jesus' authority.

Think of the changes we have experienced just in the 21st Century. 9-11 has brought heightened security in airline travel. The internet has brought instant communication which has actually mobilized people to such a great extent that rulers and governments have been brought down. The cultural and religious mix in America has shifted dramatically.

Do you resist change? Whether you resist it or not, change comes.

Jesus stopped the sacrifices that day because God's intent was to do something more permanent about our problem of sin and broken communion with God.

It takes a sacrifice to overcome our sin and restore that communion. But as you can see, the sacrifice of animals was inadequate. We still sin. Week after week we have the need to confess our wrongs. No matter how many times we do it, we can never make a sacrifice good or worthy enough.

Hebrews says:

The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves. The sacrifices under that system were repeated again and again, year after year, but they were never able to provide perfect cleansing for those who came to worship. ² If they could have provided perfect cleansing, the sacrifices would have stopped, for the worshipers would have been purified once for all time, and their feelings of guilt would have disappeared. ³ But instead, those sacrifices actually reminded them of their sins year after year. ⁴ For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. ⁵ That is why, when Christ came into the world, he said to God, "You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings. But you have given me a body to offer. ⁶ You were not pleased with burnt offerings or other offerings for sin. ⁷ Then I said, 'Look, I have come to do your will, O God-- as is written about me in the Scriptures.'" (Hebrews 10:1-7)

Jesus entered the temple as that divine sacrifice that forever takes away our guilt. And so there is no more need of the temple. Despite anyone's resistance, the old temple would go. READ Mark 13:1-2

The new temple now is established in you through faith in Jesus Christ. So we come to this gathering place to celebrate that good news. We invite everyone to this place to hear that news. No exclusion. This place of worship is where all nations are invited in to pray, to get to know the One True God who has taken away our sins once and for all in Jesus Christ. The old temple is torn down so that it may be built up again as Christ in you, until the whole world knows.

AMEN