

The Temple God Did Not Need by Jeff Strite

2 Chronicles 6:12-7:2

OPEN: I want to set the stage for the text we're going to read this morning. All of Israel has gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the completion of the Temple Solomon had built for God. This was a time of great excitement and the festivities lasted for 14 days and made sacrifices of 22,000 cattle, and 120,000 sheep and goats. Some of those sacrifices were offered up in entirety to God... but many of them were shared in common meals among the worshippers.

It's in the midst of this celebration that Solomon blesses the people and bows before God in their presence to offer up this prayer: (READ 2 Chronicles 6:12-39 & 7:1-2)

OFFER PRAYER

I'd like you to sing with me the first verse of this great hymn of the church - "The Church's One Foundation"

"The Church's One foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord
She is His new creation by water and the word
From heaven He came and sought her to be His holy bride,
And with His blood He bought her and for her life He died."
(Written by Samuel John Stone)

What is the church? (ask the audience for a response)

That's right. The church is Bride of Christ. It is the people who have been saved by the blood of Jesus. WE are the church... not this building.

Paul wrote this "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body." (I Corinthians 6:19-20)

This building we meet in is NOT the church.

It is merely a place where the church meets.

The ONLY thing that makes this building holy is US.

We fill this building with the Holy Spirit when we gather here to dedicate ourselves to serving God with all our hearts, souls and minds.

If you and I ever stop loving and serving Jesus Christ, this building will be ONLY a building. It won't matter what the name is on the marquee out front, or on the side of the building. If we fail to stay faithful to Christ, this church building will only be empty shell as far God will be concerned.

Now, that doesn't mean God isn't honored by church buildings.

Nor does it mean that God doesn't USE church buildings like this one.

In fact, God has used this building... A LOT

He has permitted us to use this building for His service almost every day of the week.

- There's our 2 worship services and Sunday School every Sunday morning
- The Hispanic Church every Sunday afternoon
- Church meals and meetings
- Bible studies
- Saturday Men's Prayer Breakfasts
- Counseling sessions
- Worship practices
- JAM (elementary age youth group)
- Youth Group
- The Food Pantry
- And, of course, my Office, where I work and Joyce does the Bulletin and Newsletter.

There are very few nights that this building is not used.

And there are very few times during the day that this place stands empty.

And that, of course, is why we're building on.

We want to do more for God than we can do now.

And, of course, we want to grow more than we can right now.

This new sanctuary will give us room for about 100 more worshipers.

And today we're having a special service to ask God to bless this new sanctuary.

Now to prepare ourselves for dedicating this new Sanctuary that we've been having built to God, I want to go back in time and think about the very first Temple that was built by Solomon. This Temple was constructed 480 years after Israel left their slavery in Egypt and was ultimately destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar 410 years later when Judah was led away into captivity. For those 4 centuries the Temple served as a place of worship, offerings and prayer for God's people.

Now the Sanctuary we're building is well built... but it probably won't last 400 years. About 25 workers have worked for nearly 10 months to complete our new building... and it has built out of wood, plastic, metal and drywall. When it's finished, it's going to cost about \$800,000 (of which we've already paid a lion's share of that cost)

By contrast, the Temple that Solomon built took nearly 200,000 workers and 7 years to complete. It was made from huge slabs of hewn and dressed stone. Then there was the precious stones and woven fabric that was used throughout the structure. And there were various types of wood like: Cedar, Pine, Olive wood.

They used 4,000 TONS of gold and 40,000 TONS of silver.

Someone estimated that the total cost of the Temple (in today's dollars) was about \$60 BILLION dollars. I'm not sure, but I'm guessing you could buy most of Cass county with that kind of money.

Now as impressive as that Temple was I want you to notice a few things from Solomon's prayer that day.

1st – Solomon recognized that God did NOT need the Temple that he'd built.

In his prayer of dedication Solomon admitted:

"The heavens, even the highest heavens, CANNOT CONTAIN YOU.

How much less this temple that I have built!" 2 Chronicles 6:18

In the book of Acts, Stephen (the first Christian martyr) agreed:

"... it was Solomon who built the house for him. However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says:

'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?'"

Acts 7:47-50

So, in both the Old Testament and in the New, God drove home this truth:

- you can't build a building that's BIG enough to house Him.
 - and you can't build a structure that's ELABORATE enough to impress Him
- He's God. If He wanted a building to live in, He could build something far better than we could even begin to imagine.

Now my point is this: a lot of people don't think that way.

A lot of people think God SHOULD be impressed with their building.

These folks tend to get WAY too tied up in their church buildings.

They spend elaborate amounts of money on their church structures, falsely believing that would be the best way to bring people to Christ.

ILLUS: You know, some of the most beautiful church buildings ever constructed are in Europe. I once read the observations of one man who visited several of these Cathedrals and he said:

"I saw amazing church buildings with incredible architecture. They were old, and their history was incredible. (But) some of them no longer had worship services. Some of them had small rooms partitioned off for current members. In most of them, there were more tourists during an average day than worshipers on a given Sunday." (Steve Ridgell)

These are huge cathedrals, but virtually no one uses them to worship God. They've become basically irrelevant for the cause of Christ.

They became places for museums rather than places for ministry (REPEAT)

When we start worshiping in this new Sanctuary... we need to remember that.

We should remember that beautiful buildings should not be our focus.

We're should NOT try to win people to a beautiful building, we should try to win people to a beautiful Savior.

Jesus won't NEED our building... but our building will NEED Jesus

So, 1st, Solomon recognized that God didn't need the Temple he'd built.

2ndly, Solomon recognized that God owned the Temple.

“When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. The priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it.” II Chronicles 7:1-2

In his prayer, Solomon said that he had built that Temple.
But once it was built God FILLED that building with His Spirit.
From that day on it was called “the Temple of the LORD”

Now here’s what I see.
God didn't need the Temple, but once it was dedicated to Him – it BELONGED to Him.

In the same way, God doesn't need this church building, but once we've dedicated it to Him – it will belong to Him. But NOT as some sort of sacred talisman or treasure. It will belong to God as a tool.

ILLUS: You see this communion table? We've had various singing groups and other outside groups come in who have needed to clear the stage of the pulpit and instruments... and they've needed to move the communion table as well. They'd get 2 or 3 guys together and be prepared to lift this heavy piece of furniture to another room.

But then they discovered it wasn't heavy at all.

Do you know why it's not heavy?

That's right, it's made out of hollow doors. Years ago, one of the members here constructed this table out of hollow doors.

You know, I've seen people sit on this table... and nobody gets upset. Do you know why?

Yes. Because it's just a table... made out of hollow doors.

ILLUS: I pray we never get rid of this table. I pray we never replace it with an ornate communion table – you know the ones. They have all the fancy woodwork and phrase one the front that says “Do This In Remembrance Of Me.”

You know why I pray that? Because no one will ever sit on it. They'll forget that it is just a table. Folks will be tempted to make this more than “just a table.” They'll be tempted to make it an object of worship.

I was lying in bed last night and I got thinking about that.

(I knelt down in front of the table)

Can you picture people kneeling before this table and praying to it and regarding it as a sacred table?

It's JUST a table.

There's nothing special about this table.

It's just a tool.

Because on this table is something that IS a precious and sacred commodity. Every Sunday we place these communion plates on this table and the table serves as a tool to hold the most precious meal ever eaten. It's not the table that is sacred... it's the communion that sets on it that is sacred.

In the same way we should NOT worship our building. But we should use this building as a tool for God, because it holds the most sacred commodity in the world. Do you know what that sacred commodity is?

That's right, this building holds the Church – the people that Jesus died to save.

So 1st, Solomon recognized that God didn't need the Temple he'd built

2ndly, Solomon recognized that God owned the Temple.

And 3rd Solomon recognized that the Temple was worthless if it was filled with unrepentant sinners

"When they sin against you— for there is no one who does not sin— and you become angry with them and give them over to the enemy, who takes them captive to a land far away or near; and if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captivity and say, 'We have sinned, we have done wrong and acted wickedly'; and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their captivity where they were taken, and pray toward the land you gave their fathers, toward the city you have chosen and toward the temple I have built for your Name; then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their pleas, and uphold their cause. And forgive your people, who have sinned against you." II Chronicles 6:36-39

I'm convinced that once we start worshiping in this new sanctuary we'll be blessed some fairly phenomenal growth. And if God grants us that kind of growth:

- We might get tempted to think we're pretty good stuff.
- We might get tempted to think we're more special than anyone else in town.
- And we might get tempted to think that God loves us more than anyone else.

If we should ever get tempting to thinking that way, we need to remember this one verse:

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Does that mean you have sinned and fall short of the glory of God?

Does that mean I have sinned and fall short of the glory of God?

We need to remember .this new sanctuary is for sinners who've been shown mercy.

That's you... and that's me.

We need to remember that it is for who've failed to praise a gracious God.

That's you... and that's me.

We need to remember it's for those who don't always think and act and speak like they should.

That's you... and that's me.

We always need to remember that this building is a place that we come to every week, to be reminded of how much God has done for us and how much we need His mercy and grace.