

On Dedicating a Building

Luke 21

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There is an old movie, *Groundhog Day*, where Bill Murray's character realizes that he is living the same day over again. The weather is the same. The same people greet him. It all feels the same. That describes my thoughts this morning. If I blink, I go back to May of 2000. After 72 Sundays of setting up and tearing down at Merrillville High School, we had our first Sunday at our new Crown Point campus. New auditorium, classrooms, and parking. Everything was sparkly new. Everyone was excited. We had former pastors there including Pastor Troyer and Pastor Joe Stowell. There was just a wonderful spirit in the place and a sense that this was a new chapter in our story.

If I blink, here we are. Everyone is excited. Everything's new and sparkly. The toilets flush. The Commons is air conditioned. The sound is great. We have past leadership here. The feel here is wonderful.

You know what we did 15 years ago at our Crown Point building dedication? We brought out the Bible and we did what I think is the hallmark of our church. We asked, *how should we biblically think about a new building God has provided for us?* Or we could ask this question more broadly, as God has provided us with four campuses all with tremendous facilities, *how should we see and use these buildings for gospel ministry?* Today I give a refreshed version of the same message I gave on May 21, 2000.

Clearly we don't have to have buildings. The church for 300 years didn't have dedicated church buildings. Many churches in China meet in open fields. So while buildings are not a requirement, they have a place and a purpose. What is it? It's good for us to know, as all four of our campuses are blessed with ministry space.

This is important because buildings create problems for God's people. I was preaching one time at an out-of-town church talking about the glory of Christ. I said, when a church doesn't have Jesus as the focus, they will fight over all kinds of petty things, like the color of the carpet or paint. I didn't know it, but apparently there was a big fight going on in the church over the new paint colors. The pastor told me later someone had questioned whether he had fed me that line. I knew nothing about it.

Any material thing in this world is a slippery doctrinal slope. Make too much of it and you make an idol out of things (Pantheism). Make too little of it and you have the ancient heresy of Gnosticism. Luke 21 provides us with a wonderful glimpse into Jesus' take on this. This is Jesus' final week before his crucifixion. He is in Jerusalem. He is teaching in the general area around the temple.

"Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on." (Luke 21:1-4)

You could arrange this passage around what impresses Jesus and what doesn't impress Jesus. He is clearly impressed by the faith and generosity of the widow. Her faith in God is on display by her willingness to give everything she monetarily had to God. Why was that

impressive? Her giving showed her trusting; in her case, not in the meager supply of two pennies, but in the plenty and promise of God. In God she trusts. Jesus says she gave more than all the rich because as a percentage of her wealth, she gave 100%. Her faith impressed Jesus.

"And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings..." (Luke 21:5) It's often easy to pick on the disciples for getting it wrong because they so often do. I have to think their admiration of the temple was similar to what we would have likely thought as well. This temple they are walking around is called Herod's temple. It is actually the third temple built on the same spot there in Jerusalem. The first temple was Solomon's temple, a beautiful place of worship and sacrifice built as God directed Solomon. It was lavishly outfitted with gold, and silver, and many precious materials. It was the center of worship for all of Israel. It housed the Ark of the Covenant. God's *Shekinah* glory came there as Solomon dedicated it. If there was ever a building to venerate, it was the first temple.

Because of Israel's rebellion, God allowed that temple to be destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC, about 100 years later. It was rebuilt by Zerubbabel although with much less grandeur as Israel was only a shadow of its former greatness.

King Herod, a regional king under the emperor of the Roman Empire, began a massive renovation in 20 BC. It was not finished until 64 AD. That's 84 years of construction. I'm glad our remodeling didn't take that long! This was the temple at the time of Jesus. It was impressive. The ancient historian Josephus tells us that some of the stones in the building were 7.5 feet high and 9 feet wide.

"The exterior of the building lacked nothing that could astonish either the soul or the eyes... He who has not seen Jerusalem in her splendor has never seen a desirable city. He who has not seen the temple in its full construction has never in his life seen a glorious building." (Josephus)

One commentator said that it warranted the status of one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. So before we get all over the disciples for being unspiritual, I doubt any of us could walk through a place of that splendor (especially in the first century) and NOT admire the architecture, art, design, and beauty of the place. The disciples did what most of us would do: *Look at the size of those stones! Look at the beautiful jewels and colors!* Jesus has a different perspective.

"He said, 'As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.' And they asked him, 'Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?' And he said, 'See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, "I am he!" and, "The time is at hand!" Do not go after them. And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.'" (Luke 21:6-9)

The disciples made two crucial mistakes.

They Failed to See the Temple in its Redemptive Significance

For them, and all the other Jews at the time, the temple structure symbolized all that they believed about God and faith. The temple was the most significant aspect of their entire religious system. This is why it was so scandalous for Jesus to say in John 2:19, "Destroy

this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." It wasn't even done yet. But Jesus knows the future and sees the temple's role as very temporary. In fact, what happened to that veil in the temple when Jesus died? It was torn in two.

And here Jesus says, *"the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.* (Luke 21:6) And he was right. Roughly 40 years later, just a few years after it was totally finished, the Romans came and flattened Jerusalem and destroyed the temple.

So Jesus looked at the building and saw it in its redemptive significance. It's temporary. It's passing away. It will not last or endure. Not only because the temple was going to be destroyed, but because its purpose was being replaced by one far greater.

The Beauty of the Temple Distracted Them From the Beauty of Christ

The book of Hebrews tells us that the entire Levitical system of sacrifices, including the temple structure, was a shadow of a greater reality, a greater beauty, a greater salvation-- Jesus himself. Compared to Jesus, the temple was actually ugly in comparison. Jesus is far better.

Yet the disciples are walking next to Jesus distracted by the size and beauty of the building. If I was Jesus, I would be indignant, *Don't be fascinated with this! Do you realize who is walking next to you?* The fleeting beauty of the building distracted them from the eternal and lasting beauty of Jesus.

These mistakes have been repeated time and time again through the centuries by churches and church people. Missing what really matters. So what I'm saying is, with this new facility, we have to see it as Jesus saw the temple—in its redemptive role.

Is this building a temple? No. Is it sanctuary? No. The human heart is where we worship God in Spirit and truth. So what is it?

This building that we dedicate today is simply one big ministry tool for the kingdom and glory of God.

If we see it as anything more than that, it's too important.

Just like the temple, there is coming a day when not one brick will stand on another. These walls will be thrown down. These beams will be broken. We have built a temporary structure; a tool. 2 Peter 3:10 tells us that this whole world will be destroyed and that includes this building. There is nothing permanent here.

But it does provide wonderful opportunities and a role for the glory of God. It is place of community, worship, teaching, and prayer. Think of the spiritual memories that will be made here. It's a space where people will hear the Word of God. It's a space where people will follow in believer's baptism. It's a context for spiritual conversations. God-glorifying music. Teaching and equipping. Tears of repentance and joy. Words of testimony. Reports of missions work around the world. Think of all the things that will take place here.

This is not a temple, but it is a tool. If it is a tool, I say we use it with maximum effectiveness. We remember that it is a tool. Dedicated to God, God can use tools.

- When a first grader draws pictures of his family on the wall in the hallway, we built this so that he could be here.
- When the teenagers accidentally break something, we built this building so that they could be here.
- When unbelievers come here talking and acting like unbelievers, we built this building so that they might come and hear the words of life.

This whole thing is one giant tool and we don't worship tools, we worship God. There is nothing sacred here. There is nothing eternal here. Except the Word of God we preach and the people of God we love.

"The fairest combinations of marble, and stone, and wood, and painted glass, are worthless in God's sight, unless there is truth in the pulpit, and grace in the congregation...The temple in which the Lord Jesus delights most, is a broken and contrite heart, renewed by the Holy Ghost." (J.C. Ryle, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: St. Luke, Vol. 2, p. 357.)

How do you honor a tool? By using it.

Tools are important. We greatly appreciate the skill our construction team put into this. Thank you for careful design and making an effective tool here. We need to take care of it. A carpenter takes care of his tools. He keeps his blades sharp. He doesn't leave them sitting out in weather. So let's take care of it, without worshipping it.

This Building is Being Dedicated as a Place Where Jesus is Magnified

The mistake of the disciples was that they missed the greater reality for the lesser reality and the greater reality here is the same as that day at the temple—it's Jesus. His life while here on earth was one of moral beauty and perfection. His death on the cross was love embodied. Jesus laid down his life, paying the penalty for our sins. And it was the most beautiful act of sacrificial love ever done.

This Jesus is our Lord and Savior. This Jesus is our King and Master. And this building is dedicated to magnifying his beauty and his glory and the salvation that he offers to men. On the opening day in his new church building, the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Charles Spurgeon said,

"I would propose that the subject of the ministry of this house, as long as this platform shall stand, shall be the person of JESUS CHRIST. I am never ashamed to avow myself a Calvinist...But if I am asked what is my creed, I must reply, 'It is Jesus Christ.'" The body of divinity to which I would pin and bind myself forever, God helping me, is Christ Jesus, who is the sum and substance of the gospel, who is himself all theology, the incarnation of every precious truth, the all glorious embodiment of the way, the truth, and the life!" (Charles Spurgeon, March 25, 1861.)

Hey, Bethel, what do you think of your new building? *It's all for Him.*

Why did you guys build it? *We built it for him.*

Who did you dedicate it to? *We dedicated it to Jesus.*

What are you going to use that for? *We're going to magnify Jesus to as many people in Northwest Indiana and around the world as we possibly can.*

To Jesus Christ alone be the glory in everything that is done in this wonderful tool that God has given. To him alone be the glory.

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