



Surrender After 60 Years

As young conscripts they pledged never to surrender. On May 27, 2005, as old men they emerged from their hiding place in the Philippines - two Japanese Imperial Army soldiers, asking to go home. The men were Yoshio Yamakawa at the age of 87, and Tsuzuki Nakauchi, 85. They had been hiding on the island of Mindanao, which is 1000 kilometers from Manila, since before the end of the second world war.

The British daily newspaper, The Guardian, reported, "They were former members of a division whose ranks were devastated in fierce battles with US forces towards the end of the war. The soldiers had remained in the jungle and mountains since then, possibly unaware that the war had ended 60 years ago, and afraid that they would be court-martialed for desertion if they showed their faces again."

How much had they missed in 60 years because they were living under the strings of the past? Can you imagine living under the shadow of something that did not exist anymore? I can't. However, many religious people today live under the shadow of something that Christ has put an end at the cross. The sad reality is that many believers have not experienced the full understanding, joy and blessing of God's community, His Ecclesia, Jesus' Body, because they are trapped in an inaccurate perspective of God's church - that church is an extension of the tabernacle, of the Temple of Jerusalem, "God's house"! What?! You are saying that the church building isn't God's House?! Yes, that is what I'm saying and that is what I do believe! Well, you may think that I have gone too far now! But before you turn me off, or even throw some small rocks at me and kindly classify me as heretic, bear with me please!

To be honest with you, growing up, churches always intimidated me. Not the Church, as in the body of believers as we have studied here in "Be the Church". I'm talking about the building. As a kid, going to a "church" was always such a chore: we often had to dress up, we couldn't run and play in the building (the parking lot was fine, though), and in the sanctuary, we were supposed to be very quiet. Silence was preferred. There were some specific areas in the sanctuary that I could not go, because they were holier and off limits to little boys like me! The rationale given was that the church was God's house and therefore I had to be especially reverent in it.

Let me ask you, did you experience something similar. Have you grown up with this understanding of God's House? Do you remember any specific situation or words involving the

concept of the church building as God's House? Take this time to share your experience with those around you!

Countdown 2' Minutes

I'm guessing I'm not alone in feeling intimidated by churches. We have come to treat the church building as if God's presence is somehow more intense there than it is in other places, which naturally makes churches rather intimidating. But my question is, where has this understanding about church buildings come from? Was that something that God had in mind?

So, in our last message of the series, Breakthrough, where we are trying to define church by what it is not, my goal is to share with you that the church building is not God's House, because, "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things." Acts 17:24, 25 NASB

When the apostle Paul spoke those words, he was in Athens, a city full of temples and idols, and as the bible says, Paul was "deeply disturbed" by such idolatry (Acts 17:16).

The idolatry that Paul was facing was based in an interesting philosophy that can be traced to the religions of the Ancient Near Eastern. In a simple way, for them, the universe was divided into three levels: the heavens where the gods lived, the earth where humans lived, and the underworld where the dead "lived". Heaven and earth were separated by the sky and as long as the gods lived in their heavenly temples, they were inaccessible to the humans on earth. However, certain places could act as portals between the mortal and the divine/heavenly, termed now 'sacred space'. Once a sacred space was identified, temples were built to entice the gods, preferably a powerful god or goddess, to take up residence. The temple was the connection point between heaven and earth, deity and humankind, the location of residence of the gods. As such, temples were less places of worship and more the palaces of the deity.

If a god/goddess was successfully brought to the city, he or she would take up residence in their temple, using their idol as an avatar, and it and the people would enter into what Professor John Walton calls the "Great Symbiosis". The humans would provide for the needs and wants of the god while the god, mostly out of self-interest, would bring justice, order, fertility, and strength to his or her city.

That was the belief behind the idolatry that the apostle Paul was facing in Athens. It was against such an understanding about gods, idols, temples, and the relationship between the deities and humans, that Paul confronted them with the biblical God, YAHWEH, the creator of Heavens and Earth. YAHWEH is not limited to His creation, He has no need for a sacred place, a temple to

come to humankind. YAHWEH does not rely on the Great Symbiosis as He has no needs that man can fill and is entirely self-sufficient. Neither is YAHWEH temperamental. While YAHWEH could be exacting in justice, His reasoning is always rooted in violations of His already stipulated law. So, if the relationship with YAHWEH is not based on the Great Symbiosis, on this exchange of favors, what is it based on? Take some time to read some Bible verses with those around you and find out the basis of our relationship with YAHWEH.

3' Countdown - Read: 1 John 4:16, 19; Ephesians 2:4-5; Psalm 136:26; and Zephaniah 3:17

The love of God, for us, is the basis of our relationship with Him! This might be the most shocking part of YAHWEH's temple in the Old Testament: He chose to be with humans simply because He wanted to.

"Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them" Exodus 25:8 (NASB).

Unfortunately, it is problematic for the pure and holy God to interact with defiled and unholy humans. But, that is what the whole of the tabernacle and later temple was about: making such a relationship possible! The laws and sacrifices focused on purifying humanity so that they could relate with God and vice versa. Of course, this was an imperfect system. Relationship with YAHWEH was essentially restricted to the temple, although we are well aware that YAHWEH could not be contained by the temple.

First, He had His people construct the tabernacle and the temple for the express purpose of being able to live and be among His people. In this way, the temple was a precursor to the incarnation of Christ, who came to make His dwelling among us.

As God made flesh, Jesus was the temple made living, breathing flesh (John 1:14). The idea of the temple found its ultimate reality in Christ, who in doing so replaced the temple. Jesus called Himself the temple (John 2:19-21), declared Himself to be greater than the temple (John 12:5-6), and dismissed the earthly temple as being ultimately obsolete (Matthew 24:2; John 4:21-24 and Mark 15:38).

And now what? Since the temple is no longer in place, what is God's plan? Let's go to the Bible. Read these verses with those around you: Matthew 18:20; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Cor. 3:16; and 1 Peter 2:5 and discuss your thoughts about them!

3' Countdown

One of the great theological changes from the Old Testament to the New Testament times is the notion of temple. Formerly, the temple was the single building where God's presence was made

known. In Christian times, however, the temple is not a building but God's people. God is present wherever His people meet. In the eternal heavenly city, this notion is carried to its fullest and most wonderful extreme. John did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

The reality is that we can experience God's presence in a church building, not because of the building itself, but because of the people, the people are the house of God. Where the people of God are meeting, there God will manifest Himself! God's house" is wherever His believers are. God's house could meet at a churching building, at home, out in nature, in the streets! Understanding ourselves as the living temple of God demands that we approach everything in life with an attitude of holy awareness. Let's be the Church! Loving and Serving.