

Following Jesus

Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series

Pastor David Palmer

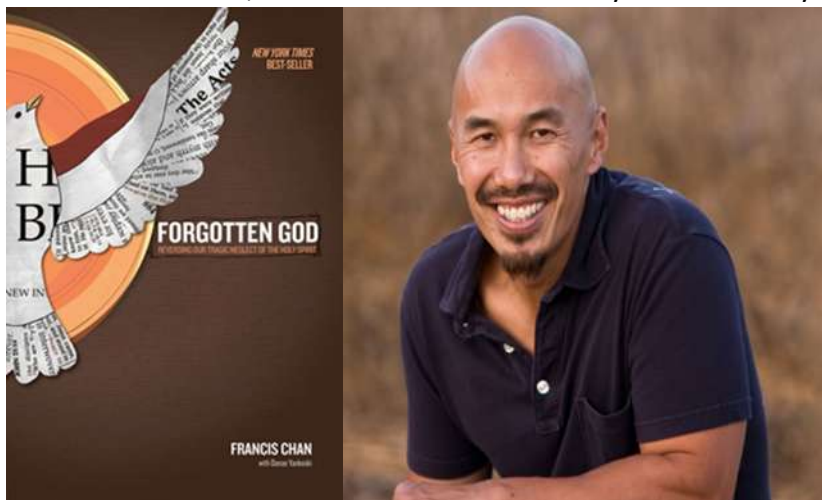
May 25, 2025

TEXT: Ephesians 2:11-21



Good morning, beloved. We continue this morning in our series on the Holy Spirit: Why we need the Holy Spirit. We have learned from God's Word that the Holy Spirit is God's end-time promise fulfilled. The Holy Spirit creates in us new spiritual life, gives us a desire for God. The Holy Spirit motivates our desire for holy living.

We have asked ourselves the question Francis Chan asks in his book, *The Forgotten God*. It is a question Francis Chan asks, "When was the last time you undeniably saw the Holy Spirit at work in or



around you?" We asked that question several weeks ago, and I have been so blessed to hear from many of you who have asked that question and prayed with a fresh resolve, "Lord, would you fill me with the Holy Spirit? Would you allow me to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in my life?" I have heard from some of you that

you have experienced Christ's presence, the presence of God in prayer and devotion, experiencing Him in leading or guiding decisions, experiencing Him through the counsel of a

brother or sister in Christ, seeing Him answer prayer. This is the reality and the accomplishment of Christ's death and resurrection, to forgive us so that we can be filled with God's presence.

This morning, we look at Jesus Christ's great building project. We ask this morning, "Why do we need the Holy Spirit?" We are going to see in this passage before us that we need the Holy Spirit because the church is God's dwelling place, His temple in the world, the place where heaven and earth meet in Christ. God desires to dwell among us. There are two great building projects in the Old Testament where we see this happen. The first is in the book of Exodus, when God rescues our ancestors from oppression and slavery, leads them to the mountain of Pentecost, the original Pentecost, to Sinai. God descends in fiery glory and speaks His Word to His people. Then, in His grace, God leans Mount Sinai on its side, so to speak, and constructs the tabernacle. In Exodus 40:2-3, God tells Moses:

"On the first day of the first month you shall erect the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. And you shall put in it the ark of the testimony."

The architectural plan of the tabernacle is like a portable Mount Sinai. At the end of the book of Exodus, the tabernacle is set up. In Exodus 40:16 we read:

"This Moses did; according to all that the Lord commanded him, so he did."

Moses does according to what God instructed him. Everything is ready and prepared. The tent of meeting is set up.

The climax of the book of Exodus is in chapter 40, at the end. Moses finished the work. It was all set up, and then God came. In Exodus 40:34-35 we read:

"Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the Cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle."



God Himself came and dwelled at the center of the life of the community, visible Glory, His presence there filling the tabernacle. God's people experienced His presence, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the middle of the camp. This is a great visual for how God is the center of our lives: God's presence dwelling in the midst of His people.

And God's presence journeyed with them and actually guided them. Exodus 40:36-38 tells us:

“Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.”

Whenever the visible cloud of God's glory, His presence, would rise up from the sanctuary and go to a new spot, that was where God was leading us. Isn't that amazing? Where we see God visibly going, we follow, and when God stops, we stop. It is very concrete and real. There are even songs that go with it. Israel has songs for every time the sanctuary moved, to celebrate.

The tabernacle was a portable Mount Sinai. The fixed, or established tabernacle, is the temple in Jerusalem built by Solomon. This is the second great building project in the Old Testament.



The same thing happened to that tabernacle: God came to dwell among us. We read in 2 Chronicles 5:1,7, that Solomon completed the work of the Lord and that the Ark of the Covenant, this box in the center of Israel's worship—there is no depiction of God Himself; this is just His throne carved of gold, containing the tablets of the

Covenant—the Ark is moved into the sanctuary, and then God Himself descends and fills the temple.

As God fills the sanctuary, worship erupts. We read that there were Levitical singers in fine linen, cymbals, harps, and lyres. And there were even 120 priests who were trumpeters. The trumpet is a great instrument for God's glory. There are songs that go with it. When God fills the temple, the community bursts into song. It is a great song. It is a song of praise. and it goes back and forth. It says, *“Praise the Lord for He is good. His steadfast love endures forever.”* This is one of the top praise and worship songs in ancient Israel. *“Praise the Lord for He is good. His steadfast love endures forever.”* It is so memorable. Psalms 136 just repeats this over and over and over. When you are unsure of what to say in praise of God, this song is available to you, inspired by the scriptural lyrics. *“Praise the Lord for He is good and His steadfast love endures forever.”*

The temple is a place of worship. It is a place where the king, after the sanctuary is dedicated, turns to the people and says, in 2 Chronicles 6:4:

"Blessed be the Lord."

King Solomon, in a great example of godly leadership, gets on his knees and lifts his hands to God, and he prays. He prays as God fills the sanctuary with His presence. And Solomon consecrates this space as a place where heaven and earth connect, where God is present to the community.

That night, God appears to Solomon and speaks to him. He says, in 2 Chronicles 7:12:

"I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for Myself as a House..."

The Lord promises that He would be attentive to the prayers offered from this place. It is in this context that the Lord says, in 2 Chronicles 7:14:

"If My people who are called by My name humble themselves, and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

God desires to dwell among us as His people. The Bible begins in the Garden of Eden with God walking with His people and us with God, hearing His voice; then in the tabernacle; then in the temple, God's dwelling place.

This morning we see Jesus' greatest temple-building project. In Ephesians 2, this imagery of the temple as Jesus' greatest construction project emerges slowly, and then it comes into striking view in the end. I was reviewing for this sermon the top twenty-five most expensive building projects going on on planet Earth in the year 2025. It was really interesting. Skyscrapers, massive public works, airports, tunnels, huge expenses. I was thinking I would share the intro of this sermon about these top projects, but the more I looked at them, the less and less I was impressed by them. What impressed me most was seeing that the greatest building project happening on planet Earth in 2025 is the construction project that Jesus Christ is leading. It is a building that He is building and it is a building that is alive. It is made of human beings. And it is the building where God himself chooses to dwell by His Spirit. We will see this emerge as we look closely at this stunning passage together.

The passage starts with Jesus surveying the building site. This is an important part of the building project. When the passage begins, the site that is surveyed is comprised of scattered, divided people. It doesn't look very promising. It begins with a call to remember that at one time you of the nations in the flesh, that is, of people from all over the world, the so-called un-circumcision—which is a slanderous term by those called the circumcision made by human

hands—remember that we of the nations, this disparate divided group, that we were at that time, in our old life, separated from Christ. In Ephesians 2:11-12, Paul tells us:

“Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands, remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”

We were without Christ. We were alienated from the polity, or commonwealth, of Israel. We were strangers to the covenants of God. And we were without hope, without God in the world. This is not a very promising site. A group of people hopeless, Godless, without Christ, strangers—foreigners—to all things of God. That's what it looks like. If you and I were building a building, and we came to a site and it looked like that, it does not look very promising.

But this survey of the building site takes a dramatic turn in verse 13, with what theologians call the “eschatological now.” What is the “eschatological now”? It is: “Remember how it used to be? Now something is changed.” Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:13:

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

What is changed is that in Christ Jesus, we who were disparate, divided, far away from God, without God; we who were once far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ. That is temple language. It is the language of sacrifice. The verb *karab* in Hebrew means to be brought near; it means to offer a sacrifice. *Korban* is the noun for sacrifice. What Paul is describing is that people who are far away from God get gathered together and brought close to God through the power of Jesus' sacrifice. All of a sudden the building site looks different.

Secondly, we read that suddenly the building site, according to Jesus, requires demolition work. I remember when the Great American skyscraper was built in Cincinnati. It was the tallest building in the United States to be opened that year. I am the kind of person that likes to go and see construction projects happen. I still remember going and looking at it at multiple stages. I remember seeing the foundation for the skyscraper dug out. I still remember seeing the size of the hole in the ground and thinking, “A skyscraper is going to emerge from here.”

There is demolition work that has to happen in Christ's building project, and that is described for us in this breathtaking sentence beginning in Ephesians 2:14:

“For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility.”

He—that is, Jesus—is our peace, who has made both one, disparate people united, reconciled. And here's the demolition: Jesus has broken down in His flesh and His body the dividing wall of hostility. Jesus Christ tears walls down.

Without Christ, we put walls up. For Paul, this had a very specific referent. It was a wall that he knew well, that he had walked past in his own life. This wall was actually the reason why Paul is



writing Ephesians in prison. The Jerusalem that he knew and that Jesus knew is the Jerusalem of the first century. The temple courts around the sanctuary made up the largest public square in the ancient world. Two hundred thousand people could stand on the Temple Mount. That is a large group. As you approach the Temple Mount, you see that the western side is a massive retaining wall. Herod the Great built this retaining wall to expand the surface area, or the

area that then could be contained on the Temple Mount. The Western Wall contains stones that are some of the largest quarried stones ever used in construction. Some of the stones weigh 600 tons. They are quarried, then moved into place. Some of the stones are the size of a school bus. They are set in place and build up this massive wall. What you see here, the famous Western Wall in Jerusalem today, is just a small portion of Herod's retaining wall. When you come up onto the sanctuary mount, the Temple Mount itself, and you approach the sanctuary, there is a small wall. But it is a significant wall. First century



writers tell us that this wall was just four feet high, the very low band that you see around the sanctuary in this image. This wall marked out the dividing wall. And it stated, with warning stones at regular intervals, that people of different ethnic backgrounds could not pass through this wall. Only ethnic Israelites passed this wall. The warning stones said that if you pass this wall, then you yourself are responsible for your own death. This means, in the thinking

of those who put up the wall, that God would carry out this judgment.

Two of these stones have been found. This one is in the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul, Turkey. It says very clearly that no one from another ethnic background can come past this. Paul believes, and the New Testament writers believe, that Jesus Christ takes this wall down by His death. In His death this wall comes down and any like it. We are wall builders in our fallenness. Jesus Christ is a wall demolisher, and in His death, He takes this wall down. In Himself, He creates one new humanity in place of these warring, divided groups. He is the only One who can do this.



Ephesians 2:15 says:

"...that He might create in Himself one new Man in place of the two, so making peace..."

Jesus' demolition work that is required for His great building project is to destroy man-made barriers that would separate, whether that be a physical object or the animosity that can exist between people and people groups. In His death on the cross, in Ephesians 2:16, we read:

"[so that He] might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility."

Jesus reconciles us both to God and to one another in one body through the cross; and at the cross of Jesus Christ, the hostility that exists is destroyed. Note that this is the only place where we can find this. We cannot tear down walls on our own strength. We cannot destroy animosity, anger between people, individuals, or even within family systems. We can't get rid of it, but Jesus Christ can. He can eliminate it, and in eliminating it, He makes peace through the sacrifice of His own body. He tears down the walls that divide us. He kills the hostility, the suspicion, the mistrust, and He is beginning to create something. It is extraordinary.

As He completes His work of demolition, and He tears things down, we read in Ephesians 2:17, that He then becomes the great evangelist and proclaims peace:

"And He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near."

I love this. We can be far away from Jesus Christ, we can be running away from Him, and Jesus Christ will go after us with the proclamation of the gospel announcement of peace. People who are far from Christ turn. It is also the case that sometimes people who are near to the things of God also need the gospel. You can grow up in church, you might have six or seven Bibles at home, but your heart can be far from the Lord. Jesus will pursue you as well, and he will

proclaim peace, the gospel peace, to those who are near.

Then what happens is, through Christ, we have access—and this, again, is sanctuary language, temple imagery—access to God in one Spirit, the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 2:18, Paul tells us:

“For through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.”

The consequences of Jesus' saving work emerge clearly in the last part of this passage. In Ephesians 2:19, we read:

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”

First, we read that the consequence of Jesus' survey of the building site, of His demolition work removing barriers, is that we are no longer strangers and aliens, but we are fellow citizens. Jesus Christ is generous in conferring Kingdom-citizenship on everyone who believes. We don't have to study for a long time. We don't have to pass a test. We don't have to go through an extensive interview. If we trust in Jesus Christ, then He confers citizenship on us, an everlasting citizenship that cannot be revoked, does not expire, and we are full citizens in his Kingdom. Also, through faith in Him and His saving work, we become full members of God's family, the household of God.

It is so powerful to have family. When we have an extended family that we are part of, there is security and confidence that comes with that. We are part of an extended network of people that we know are for us and not against us. In Jesus Christ, we become part of God's family. This is not just a metaphor. It is a reality.

I remember when I lived in China. We had not been there long. My teaching partner and I were standing outside of our apartment building. We lived in a Chinese neighborhood. My teaching partner was 6'9", two meters tall. He really stood out everywhere we went. He had ten years of experience working with international students. He was a much more mature Christian than I. I was so blessed that he was my teaching partner. I learned so much from him. One of the most important decisions he made was when we first got to the campus. As foreigners, we were offered, comparatively speaking, luxurious housing. We were offered to live in a house with a gate and a security team. I looked at that house and thought, “That looks like a pretty nice house.” And Simon said, “Oh, we shouldn't live there.” I asked, “Why do you think that? That looks like the nicest house on this campus.” I was already starting to make plans. He said, “No, we should live where everyone else lives.” I agreed, and so we lived in the neighborhood with everyone else, and we got to know our neighbors. We had been there for a couple months, and one of the faculty members came to visit as the sun was setting. We were talking outside the apartment complex. She looked at us and said, “Are you Christians?” We weren't sure where

that question was coming from. Again, I'm taking my cues from Simon. He said gently, "Yes. Yes we are." She looked this way and that, and then she said, "Then we are brother and sister." Family of God.

The family of God is such a powerful truth. We are all given that status together. It is a shared status, through faith in Jesus Christ. There are no second-class citizens, just full citizens, full family members.

Then finally the building project emerges, clearly in view, right at the end. In Ephesians 2:20-22, Paul tells us we are:

"built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the Cornerstone, in Whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."

We are full citizens, full family members. We are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus being the Cornerstone. Jesus is the Cornerstone of this building. He holds the whole thing together. All things, all lines, are measured from Him, and it is in Christ that the whole structure, the whole edifice, is joined together. It is fashioned together, and it grows. It rises into a Holy Temple in the Lord. This is the building that Jesus Christ is building: a temple of a living God made of human beings. Everything close to God in the Bible is alive. Even His throne is alive; the living creatures; **us**. God's dwelling place in the end, His greatest project, greater than the tabernacle, greater than the temple, is a community of people rescued and redeemed, fashioned together into a place where the living God dwells. God dwells among us. He is here, present.

When the playground was being constructed this spring, they built a massive retaining wall on one side of the playground that leveled off the flat area. I really enjoyed watching them build that. I asked to see the biggest stone in the retaining wall and learned the stone was so heavy that it almost flipped over the excavator that picked it up. Then I was told, "We had to bring in a second piece of equipment just to balance it and move it into position and set it into the wall." That is amazing. That stone is not going anywhere. It is going to be right there. But then what happened next was even more compelling to me. They had taken these two massive pieces of equipment just to set one stone in the retaining wall. But, then they came with their hand tools and started chipping away the hard edges on the top and on the sides so that the next stone could be set in place. The Herodian stones of the retaining wall in Jerusalem have no mortar. They don't need it because they are cut to fit together. There is no mortar in the retaining wall of the playground because the stones are set together and the rough edges are chipped off.

I love to speak to you and address you as “beloved.” I say that at the beginning of every sermon for a reason: Because I want you to know deeply in your soul that you are beloved of God in Christ. That is why I keep reminding you of it. As beloved—and, I love you—I also know that you have some rough edges. You have edges in you, and so do I, that Jesus Christ needs to take His hand tools and chip off. He loves us enough that He is going to take those edges off the top and the sides so that the next stone can fit in alongside us. We are built together, then, into a dwelling place for God by the Holy Spirit. This is Jesus' greatest building project. We, beloved of God, are the temple in which the Holy Spirit of God dwells. The New Testament writers draw several consequences from this, and I want to announce these to us:

Number one: It is why we need the Holy Spirit together: because **the church is God's dwelling place. We are the temple of God in the world, the place where heaven and earth meet.** The New Testament writers tell us that this then necessitates a call to purity and holiness before God. If we are the temple, then nothing impure should come into the temple. No idolatry should be brought in. It means that we are a community that is in pursuit of holiness before God; not to earn something or achieve it, but precisely because God dwells here. That means that things that are deeply hostile to God's will and ways have no part, no place in our lives or in our life together. Do not fondle evil and welcome it into your life, because, in doing that, you invite God to leave the place where He is, and that would be catastrophic for us all. God's presence among us is to be welcomed. Welcome the Holy Spirit into your life and make your life a place that is hospitable for God's Spirit to dwell. Pursue holiness.

Number two: This also means for the New Testament writers that, since the church is the dwelling place of God, the temple of God, **we have to protect the church as a house of prayer for all nations.** That temptation to build walls will come up. When Jesus came to the temple, He overturned the tables of the money changers, and He said, *“My house is to be a house of prayer for all nations, and you have made it a den of thieves.”* Manmade walls cannot define the Kingdom. Jesus is a tearer-down of walls, and the church must retain its identity as a place where all nations are welcome; there are no strangers, no foreigners in Jesus' family, in His house and His dwelling place.

Number three: It also means for us that **we are called to the ministry of the temple in our life together.** When you think of the tabernacle, when you think of the temple, they are not just structures or buildings, they are places where certain unique things happen, and they happen there all the time. These things are to be happening now in our life together. In Christ, through the accomplishment of the Cross, you and I have been made into a priestly kingdom. You might not think of yourself as a priest, but the New Testament thinks of you as a priest. The basic task

of a priest is to bring God to people and people to God. That is our job. That is what we do in the world. When you think of the functions of the temple, the sanctuary, what happens there? Worship happens there. Worship is so important because worship changes us week by week. What we sing is what we become like and what we value. Maybe God is calling us to use our gifts in worship.

Number four: The sanctuary is also the place where God's Word is preserved and proclaimed.

Most of Israel's prophets, early Christian leaders, spoke in the temple courts, and copies of the Scripture were maintained there and distributed. That happens here. We love to restock the Bibles that people take when they are offered from here. That is an important part of being the temple of God. God's Word is available here. It is preserved; it is proclaimed; it is shared. The temple is also the place where sacrifice for sin is made. Also, sacrifice for fellowship is celebrated and enjoyed. We don't offer a sacrifice for forgiveness of sins here, but we recall and regularly remember the climactic decisive sacrifice for sins for all time in Jesus Christ. We also celebrate meals together regularly.

Number five: There is one more part of living as the temple of God, filled with the Holy Spirit. It is what God told Solomon: that he would be attentive to the prayer that is offered from this place. I want to commission you this morning, as the temple of the living God, to **be a community that prays seriously, prays for one another, and also prays as we go about this life.** We are not just the temple on Sunday morning, when we gather here. We are the temple of the living God. Just as the tabernacle was this mobile sanctuary, we function as the place where God dwells in the world, where heaven and earth are actually connected. One of the most powerful ways we do this, both here when we are gathered and also as we live throughout the week, is to be men and women of prayer for the people around us. It is a fantastic way to represent the Lord, to ask people if you could pray for them. I've never been denied that when I've asked. I've never had anyone say, "I don't want that."

I had a very profound experience this week that I want to share with you. It was unexpected. I was getting ready for this week's sermon. I had to make a customer service call. It was a big one. It was a customer service call that I knew was going to be time-consuming, and I had to enter into it to resolve an issue with a dentist bill. I knew it was going to be involved, so I was gearing up: a couple of deep breaths; focus; I'm making the call. My first step was to successfully make it through this very elaborate phone tree to find a human being. Then, suddenly, it happened. I made it all the way through! Several minutes, several different selections, and there was Karen! I heard her voice! Karen! There's a human being there! And she seemed particularly pleasant, and I was grateful for that. We talked and we had this whole thing to review, and it came to the final conclusion. It wasn't the ending that I had hoped it

would be. The ending was essentially: "This is the bill. This is what we're paying, and this is what you have to pay," which was more than I thought I would have to pay. That's how it ended up. In my heart I thought, "Okay. We've been on the phone for almost forty minutes and here we are." And then something remarkable happened. Karen said, "I see that your group name is Kenwood Baptist Church." I said, "That's right." And she said, "There are rules, but I'm going to go outside the rules for a second." And she said, "Can I pray for you?" I was stunned. That has never happened to me before on a customer service call. I said, "Karen, I would love it if you would pray for me." And she just went to God. She prayed the most beautiful prayer for me. It moved me to tears. She celebrated God as my Provider. She blessed me. All these things. I finished that call, and I said, "Thank you, Karen. Thank you for praying for me."

So you're thinking, "You're the pastor. You should be praying for others." I love to do that. But you know what? It is wonderful to receive prayer. I want us to know that every single one of us shares in this calling precisely as the temple of the living God. God says, "I will hear you." I want us to go forth this week as people prepared, as the living temple of the living God, filled with the Holy Spirit, to be ready. People around you need prayer. And as we live, and work, and serve, and love the Lord, let us ask afresh, together, "Holy Spirit, fill me. Holy Spirit, fill me and give me the real experience of Your presence." This is not a metaphor. This is a reality: God dwells among us.

Let us pray.

Precious Lord Jesus, we praise You for the accomplishment of the cross, to cleanse us, to purify us from unrighteousness, to make us a place of people among whom You delight to dwell. We welcome You here, Holy Spirit, in our lives, in our families, in our church. We pray, Lord, that You would use us this week to be the place where heaven and earth meet in Jesus Christ. Use us this week to make Your Word known, to extend Your Kingdom through the power of prayer. I pray for each person here this morning, that You would give them the very real experience of Your presence. Indwelling Spirit of God, lead and guide, direct, discern, provide opportunities for service and worship, for Your Word to be preserved and proclaimed, and above all, for prayer to be lifted up from this Your temple, Your dwelling place. Hear from heaven, Lord, and respond.

We pray in Jesus' powerful Name, Amen.