

Sun., March 24: Third Sunday of Lent

Threshold: Temple Curtain (Separation from God)

Sermon: Thresholds #4: Veil of Separation

Scripture: 1 Kings 6:29-36

Text: "Make a veil of blue, purple, and deep red yarns and of fine twisted linen. Work figures of winged heavenly creatures into its design. ... 33 Hang the veil under the clasps, and put the chest containing the covenant there behind the veil. The veil will separate for you the holy from the holiest space." -Exodus 26:31, 33

Memory Verse: "The sacrifice you desire, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and repentant heart, O God, you will not reject." -Psalm 51:17

Children's Lesson: Temple Curtain -Andrew

Blurb: Does God feel distant? Does it seem sometimes like He's not near? The Bible shows us over and over again that God never leaves us. It is we who leave Him! Yet even when we walk away, God comes after us, chasing us down, finding ways of being with us and restoring our connection to Him. This Sunday we'll look at the Old Testament system of sacrifice and the temple to see what lengths God has always gone to restore us back to Him.

Call to Worship: *Even So Come* -Andrew

Welcome: -Pastor David

Memory Verse:

"The sacrifice you desire, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and repentant heart, O God, you will not reject." -Psalm 51:17

Greeting Time

Worship Music: - Sanctify

Threshold of Glory

Fill My Heart

Is He Worthy?

Worship Prayer - Andrew

Offering: *Lift Up Your Heads* - Sanctify

Kids Moment: -Andrew

Prayers: -Andrew

Message Bumper

Message: Thresholds #4: The Door of Separation

PP#1: *Collage of door images from previous slide show: Garden of Eden, Ark, Passover, Temple.*

Thresholds: The Story of the Bible, the Story of Salvation. We have been following thresholds and doorways in the Bible's grand story of salvation. At Eden, when Adam and Eve were expelled because of their defiance to God, God placed cherubim with flaming swords to block the way to the Tree of Life, and humanity lost the paradise God intended for us. When sin spread and corrupted the entire world beyond restoration, and God sent a flood to wash away the spreading infection of sin; God closed the door of the ark in order to protect the dim light still barely flickering. When God came to free the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt, God told them to spread the blood of the Passover lamb on their doorposts as a witness that they choose to put their trust in Him. God then took His chosen people and led them into the desert, to Mt. Sinai, where God gave them laws, a system of animal sacrifice, and instructions for how to construct a tabernacle so His presence could be with them...although veiled, separated, and insulated.

PP#2: Thresholds: The Veil of Separation

“31 Make a veil of blue, purple, and deep red yarns and of fine twisted linen. Work figures of winged heavenly creatures into its design. ... 33 Hang the veil under the clasps, and put the chest containing the covenant there behind the veil. The veil will separate for you the holy from the holiest space.” -Exodus 26:31, 33

Thresholds: “The Veil of Separation” Exodus 26:31, 33 “Make a veil of blue, purple, and deep red yarns and of fine twisted linen. Work figures of winged heavenly creatures into its design. ... Hang the veil under the clasps, and put the chest containing the covenant there behind the veil. The veil will separate for you the holy from the holiest space.”

PP#3: *Perhaps the cover of the book, God-Shaped Hole by Tiffanie DeBartolo*

Humans have been created in the image of God. And that means that we have a longing, a deep yearning to be with God. It is a wholeness, a completeness, a rightness, a centeredness that comes only when we are close with God.

Do you have any awareness of this? Do you have inklings of this longing deep down within you? Has it become awakened? Is it starting to burn? Pascal said that each of us have a God-shaped hole. St. Augustine, 1200 years earlier, put it this way, “Our hearts are restless until they find rest in you, O God!”

If you have no sense of what I am talking about, then whatever I say will make no sense. I cannot help you. I will be speaking empty words. But, if you have this nagging sensation, if something has been stirred within you, then I have words of life for you! I have a story of wholeness.

The Bible calls it shalom. It was the way that we were created. God made people unique, special, so that God can have a meaningful, personal relationship with us. And this closeness with God is the paradise that was lost when people, starting with Adam and Eve, chose to put their trust not fully in God, but in ourselves. And when we *did* that—when we *do* that—we step out of the life-giving connection God intends for us to have with Him, we step away from the abundant and eternal life that comes from God.

The Bible's story is that God did not just watch us walk away. Because of His burning love for us, He pursued us! He *came* after us...He *comes* after us! This is God's very nature, His character. This is what love looks like!

So, God came to Cain after sin expelled them from paradise and warned him to guard against sin. God came to Noah and said, “I will protect the good, the light, still flickering within you.” God came to the Israelites, when they were slaves in Egypt, and vowed, “I will redeem you!”

PP#4: Exodus 19:21 “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Go down and warn the people not to break through to try to see the Lord, or many of them will fall dead.’”

Exodus 33:22 “But God said, ‘You cannot see my face, for no one can see me and live!’”

Numbers 17:12-13 “The Israelites said to Moses, ‘We are perishing. We are being destroyed. All of us are being destroyed. 13 Anyone who approaches the Lord’s dwelling will die. Are we doomed to perish?’”

After they crossed the Red Sea, Moses led the people to Mt. Sinai. There, God met with Moses up on the mountain. But God warned the people not to approach. Keep a distance! His holy presence was too much for them: broken, flawed, corrupted as they were. When God met with Moses on the mountain, God stayed hidden by a cloud. And then, when God came near, He put His hand over Moses to protect Him. Even so, when Moses came down, just from being near God’s holy glory, Moses was glowing with radiance. His face was shining so brightly that he had to wear a veil over his face for people to even look at him! (Exodus 34:29-35)

Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy: God says to them, “I want to create a way for me to be with you. I cannot be with you directly, like I was back in the Garden of Eden. You need me. I created you to be with me. So I am making a way for us to be close, even if not yet perfect.”

PP#5: *Image of the Ark of the Covenant (note: be sure the cherubim are facing each other!)*

“The final salvation will be when Jesus comes to be your sacrifice. But until then, let me give you a way for me to be with you, but carefully! You must be protected from my holy radiance. It is a system of animal sacrifice that will, in a limited way, atone for your sin, wash away your uncleanness. Follow perfectly the rules of purity, washing and cleaning your bodies, to make you able to stand at a distance from me. Have a structure of religion and a structure of priests, who care for a special place, where I will come and dwell near you. Create an ark of gold, with a cover called the Mercy Seat, with two cherubim on top, and my presence will come to rest there, even if just in part. Take this Ark of the Covenant, and hide it inside a tabernacle. Make layers of barriers around it. Let only special people, who have made special preparations, go near it on special occasions. This way, I can be near you, and yet you will not die.”

Can you see what’s going on here? God is making a way for them to be close. He cannot be with them, directly. He can only be near them. The Ark of the Covenant will symbolize His presence, but even that must be put behind protective barriers.

PP#6: *Image of tabernacle:* <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Timna-park-tabernacle-a.jpg>

At first, when the Israelites were nomadic people in the wilderness, God commanded them to create a moveable structure, called the Tent of Meeting, or the Tabernacle, to house the Ark. Here’s a picture of a reconstruction of the tabernacle in southern Israel, in the area where the Israelites would have erected it on their journeys. Notice the barriers. There is a fence around the outside. This keeps out all those who are not from the tribe of Levi. Not everyone could simply go in! You had to be a Levite. The holy animals were brought into this outer area, prepared, and

sacrificed. But, to take the offerings inside the Holy Place, that tall tent in the middle, you had to not only be a Levite, but you also had to be a priest, and only after you have made special preparations.

PP#7: *Cutaway image from <https://menorah-bible.jimdo.com/english/structure-of-the-menorah/>*

Now, look at this cutaway image of the Holy Place or Tent. Notice there are two portions. The first, outer room, is where the offerings were placed. There is the menorah, the show bread, and the horned altar. Again, only priests go in here, and only when bringing offerings. But the smaller room, in the back, is where the Ark of the Covenant was.

Now, I want you to notice something. The whole camp set up around this Tabernacle. Only Israelites were allowed in the camp. No Gentiles. In the outer yard, the barrier fence, kept out everyone except the Levites. Then, the main entrance to the Holy Place kept out all but the priests. Now, look between the Holy Place, and the inner room, the Holy of Holies. Can you see the cutaway of a *special curtain*? It's purple, with images of cherubim on it. And that curtain kept *everyone* out except the High Priest, and it even keeps him out, except once a year, and he can only come in when he is hiding behind the blood of the sacrifice of atonement that he brings in.

Do you see the barriers, separating God and His people? This is the problem of sin! Sin is a really serious problem! It is impossible to fix! This, right here, is as good as it could get! The best people could hope for was the assurance by some High Priest that God was really near them, hidden deep inside the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was a gift from God, but it was a gift that also constantly reminded the people how estranged they were from the God they yearned to be with!

PP#8: Exodus 26:31, 33

“31 Make a veil of blue, purple, and deep red yarns and of fine twisted linen. Work figures of winged heavenly creatures into its design. ... 33 Hang the veil under the clasps, and put the chest containing the covenant there behind the veil. The veil will separate for you the holy from the holiest space.”

This is the next threshold in the biblical story of salvation! It is special curtain, called the veil, that separated God from all the people. In Exodus 26, God gives the instruction for the making of the Tabernacle. And God gives special instructions for making of this very special veil. Verse 31, “Make a veil of blue, purple, and deep red yarns [these, by the way in the ancient world, were the most extravagant colors to make. Blue, purple, and deep red yarns] and of fine twisted linen. Work figures of winged heavenly creatures [cherubim] into its design. ... Hang the veil under the clasps, and put the chest containing the covenant [the Ark] there behind the veil. The veil will separate for you the holy from the holiest space.”

“The veil will separate...” This threshold in the salvation story marks for us how we are separated from God. This is the description of the human condition since the Garden of Eden. We are separated from God! Yes, God has come near, but we cannot be *with* God. There is a tragic sadness here. Yes, God is real. God is near. But God is not close. We cannot touch Him. We cannot be with Him. We are separated. And this is our misery. This is our despair.

PP#9: Image of Solomon's temple, cutaway, such as:

<https://www.realmofhistory.com/2018/07/31/3d-animated-version-of-solomons-temple/>

Now, when the Israelites finally make it to the Promised Land, and after they finally settle down, King David sets about plans for a permanent house for the Ark. His son, Solomon, builds the

permanent structure, which is called the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. This is a magnificent structure, covered completely with gold all through the inside. But it is still modeled on the same design of separation as the Tabernacle.

They take the veil from the tabernacle, and they also hang it in the temple, again separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, which is where the Ark of the Covenant stood. Now, the Temple is so much bigger, so they need to expand the temple veil.

PP#10: *Image of the Veil of the Temple, not torn. Perhaps from*
<http://www.templeinstitute.org/history-holy-temple-menorah-14.htm>

It needed to be 30 feet wide, and 60 feet tall. You know how heavy modern stage curtains are? They can kill people when lowered incorrectly! Well, for the temple curtain to be this tall and this wide, and to hang from the top, fabric experts estimate that it had to be 2-3 inches thick! They also estimated that it weighed around 5 tons, and that it would take 300 priests to carry it!

Designed into the veil were cherubim. These are the same creatures on the Ark of the Covenant, and the same angels stationed to block the entrance to the Garden of Eden. The point is clear: this curtain keeps people away from God's presence!

But then, in the Temple, an extra barrier is added. In front of the temple veil Solomon builds hard doors to reinforce the separation from God's presence on the Ark. Here, the threshold, the veil, becomes a solid, actual door!

PP#11: Scripture: 1 Kings 6:29-36 (CEV)

29 Solomon carved all the walls of the temple—inner and outer rooms—with engravings of winged creatures, palm trees, and blossoming flowers. 30 He also covered the floor of the temple with gold, in both the inner and the outer rooms. 31 He made the doors of the inner sanctuary from olive wood and carved the doorframes with five recesses. 32 He overlaid the two olive-wood doors with gold-plated carvings of winged creatures, palm trees, and blossoming flowers.

Turn to 1 Kings 6. This describes how Solomon had the temple finished, the inside of the inner rooms. Verse 29, "Solomon carved all the walls of the temple—inner and outer room [these are the two rooms, the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies]—with engravings of winged creatures [there they are again—cherubim!], palm trees, and blossoming flowers. [Notice how we have motif of the Garden of Eden here!] He also covered the floor of the temple with gold, in both the inner and the outer rooms. He made the doors of the inner sanctuary [there they are, doors covering the Holy of Holies!] from olive wood and carved the doorframes with five recesses. 32 He overlaid the two olive-wood doors with gold-plated carvings of winged creatures, palm trees, and blossoming flowers." Again, cherubim and Garden of Eden motifs.

PP#12: Scripture: 1 Kings 6:29-36 (CEV)

33 He made the door of the main hall with doorframes of olive wood with four recesses. 34 The two doors of pinewood each pivoted on a socket. 35 Solomon carved winged creatures, palm trees, and blossoming flowers, and covered them with gold. 36 He built the inner courtyard with three rows of cut stone followed by one row of trimmed cedar.

Solomon also put main doors on the outside of the larger room, the entrance into the Holy Place. Verse 33, "He made the door of the main hall with doorframes of olive wood with four

recesses. The two doors of pinewood each pivoted on a socket. Solomon carved winged creatures, palm trees, and blossoming flowers, [same motif] and covered them with gold. He built the inner courtyard with three rows of cut stone followed by one row of trimmed cedar.”

Notice we’re moving from the inner to the outer of the temple. Here, maybe this bigger view will help.

PP#13: *Image for Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem, with the courtyard, such as at:*

<https://how2walkwithgod.com/2018/11/12/dont-neglect-the-temple/>

We still have the barriers, and the levels of exclusion. There is this massive platform, enclosed by a wall, separating the temple from the rest of Jerusalem. Inside this grand courtyard is called the “Court of the Gentiles,” for non-Jews could only come in this far. Then, inside the temple itself, the first smaller courtyard, is called the “Courtyard of Women.” Women were only allowed to go in this far. Then, through the dividing wall, was the “Courtyard of Men.” Jewish men could get in this far. But around all the religious equipment, only the priests could go. And only priests could go inside the temple itself, through the doors, into the outer room, the Holy Place. But only the High Priest could go through the inner doors and behind the veil into the Holy of Holies, again, once a year, and only when carrying the blood of the sacrifice of atonement.

Are you getting weary of all these levels, all these barriers, all these restrictions? It’s so hard to keep it all straight! But this is the reality that God’s people were *privileged* to have! Without all this layering, without all this religious separation, people wouldn’t even be able to have God near.

Just sit with this for a moment. Reflect. Where would *you* be able to go? All of us, I think, wouldn’t even get into the front door! We’re all Gentiles! Do you feel that separation?

Stop for a moment and feel that inner longing for God, to be near God, to be with God. And then look closely at this layered threshold of separation. Do you see how distantly our sin removes God from us?

Now, each week I’ve been saying that each of these thresholds in the Bible’s story also shows us God’s salvation. Look here again. This complicated, burdensome religious structure was a gift, it was a way for people to have God at least near. But can you see God’s heart, God’s desire to be near people? To get as close as humanly possible? Can you see God’s longing and desire for us?

PP#14: *Image of the temple veil being torn from top to bottom when Jesus dies on the cross.*

Fast forward 1,000 years. God now finally is able to appear in Jesus. He comes to remove all barriers between us and Him. He deals with human sin, human separation, by dying the death that our separation caused. Matthew says that at the moment of Jesus’ death, the temple veil was torn, from top to bottom. Let that sink in! Torn from top to bottom! In Jesus’ death, God restores personal, intimate relationship with Him. Because of Jesus, we can have God’s Holy Spirit *reside* within us! We can again have a one-on-one relationship with our God. The God-longing of our souls can be satisfied. The God-shaped hole in our hearts can be filled.

PP#15: “The sacrifice you desire, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and repentant heart, O God, you will not reject.” -Psalm 51:17

God never wanted all the heavy religious system. But it was necessary in order to have us, even in the distant way He could. But God’s heart always just wanted us close to Him. He doesn’t

want animal sacrifices. He wants us to put our trust back in Him. He wants us to repent, turn to Him and seek Him with all of our hearts. The sacrifice God wants is for us to put our trust back in Him.

Even now, when we have Jesus, our joy is not quite complete. That will be heaven. When Jesus comes back, He will finish removing all barriers between us and God. And we will again walk and talk with God, intimately, personally, physically. Paul, when reflecting on this amazing love of God that restores us to complete connection with Him, puts it this way in the Love Chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, "Now we see like a reflection in a mirror; then we will see face-to-face. Now I know partially, but then I will know completely in the same way that I have been completely known."

Jesus has come to remove all barriers to God. He has come that we might have direct access to God. You can be restored. Your heart can be filled. Turn to God. Trust in Jesus. Be made whole! Amen.

Closing Song: *God of Grace and God of Glory* -Sanctify

Memory Verse:

"The sacrifice you desire, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and repentant heart, O God, you will not reject." -Psalm 51:17

Announcements: -David

Benediction: -David