

## Building a Temple

Scripture Text: Ephesians 2:19-22

### Introduction

Good Hope's mission statement says, "*At Good Hope Baptist, we are Sharing the good news about Jesus, creating a Loving place, where His people are Discerning the work He has called them to do, and where His people are Equipping one another to do His work.*" This statement defines several things about who we want to be as a people of God. We want to be a people who share the hope that we have in Christ with others who do not have that same hope. We want this place to be a loving place where we enjoy each other's fellowship, where we pray for, teach and encourage one another, and where we serve one another with love and compassion. We want to discern what God wants us to do by studying His Word so that we learn more about Him and by praying together for Him to reveal His will to us. Lastly, we want God's church here at Good Hope to be equipping one another to do His work by teaching and encouraging one another, and by correcting one another in sincere love for the purpose of reconciliation. Sharing. Loving. Discerning. Equipping.

Our mission is to be disciples of Jesus Christ who help others become disciples of Jesus Christ. This is like building a house. You do not build a house without work, time, and investment in it. Think about the temple King Solomon built in the Old Testament. He needed a plan. You do not start a huge project like that without a plan, without knowing where you are going. Solomon needed to gather the right materials. He needed to assemble the right workers. He needed to instruct them to build the structure in a certain way. He also needed time. The Temple in Jerusalem was not built overnight or in one week or one month. It took *seven years* to build it (1 Kings 6:38). The Church is much like the Temple. In fact, we are the new Temple of God. The Church is not the building in which we meet, but the people God has called. Like Solomon's Temple, there needs to be a plan, there needs to be a Master Architect, there needs to be the right materials, and there needs to be time and work involved to build His Church into His holy temple. Therefore, for the next two Sundays, we are going to look at how God builds His temple and furnishes it with disciples of Jesus Christ.

### God Assembles the Right Materials

One thing we ought to realize is who we are. I am not talking about your name. Paul mentioned earlier in this letter that the Church is composed of people who God saved by His grace, mercy, and great love. Not one of us is saved or declared right with God by the things we have done or have not done. It is by God's amazing grace and our faith in Jesus Christ that we are saved, not by our own doing (Ephesians 2:4-9). Because of God's great love for us, those who believe in Christ have been brought together into fellowship with God and adopted into the household of God. Look at the following verse.

***Ephesians 2:19*** <sup>19</sup> *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,*

There is a wonderful promise in this passage. Paul reminded us in this verse that all of us were at one time alienated from God. At some point, we were all strangers to God. We were foreigners to His kingdom. Sin had separated us from God and there was no way for us to change that. Paul referred to our previous situation as being strangers and aliens. Both refer to a kind of people who are not part of the resident population and have little or no rights. All of us were at one time separated from God, but that was then. Because of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, those who believe in Christ and confess Him as Lord are reconciled to God and "naturalized" into His kingdom. No one is a natural born citizen in the kingdom of God, but God provides a path to citizenship. Those who are in Christ are no longer strangers and aliens, but are fellow citizens in His kingdom. Citizens receive certain rights, privileges, and protections that foreigners do not have, such as the ability to vote in an election. The same is true for God's people. We become citizens in His kingdom with rights and privileges that others do not have.

Not only are those who follow Jesus called citizens, they are also a part of God's family. They are no longer alienated from Him, but they become equal members in His house. No one joins God's family by family descent, by ethnicity, or by working into it (John 1:12-13). We are all adopted children of God by the blood of Jesus Christ. This would have been wonderful news to the Gentiles at the time Paul wrote this, as they were generally excluded from fellowship. Because of Christ, Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians are equal members of God's Church. This is a beautiful picture of God's love towards all of us. God takes in total strangers, even enemies, and makes them His children. He adopts them into His family and all of them receive the same rights and privileges of being in God's family. Those who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior receive forgiveness of sin. They receive a new name and a new life. The past is gone and a glorious future is now born. They have no condemnation or fear of judgment. They receive eternal life with God. That is who God assembles for His Church.

### **God Builds His Church Upon Christ**

Being citizens and members of the household of God is an important thing. We ought to not take that lightly. God does not invite us to fill a seat in a building or a name on a roll, but He invites us to join His kingdom and His family. He also invites us to become something magnificent that He is building. Remember what we have learned about the Church? The Church is not a building with a steeple, or a business that serves your desires, or a club with many perks. The Church is God's people who are saved by His grace. That is true...but in a sense, the Church, the people of God, is also *a building*. We see this description in another of Paul's letters. Look at the passage below.

**1 Corinthians 3:9** *For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.*

Paul uses language to denote something that is cultivated and built. God is building us into something. He is creating something new, which should not be a surprise to anyone. That is what God does. He is the Creator. According to the passage in Ephesians, the Church is built. It is put together. Look at the following verses.

***Ephesians 2:19-20*** <sup>19</sup> *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,* <sup>20</sup> *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,*

Paul uses language in this passage to denote something God is putting together, like building a house. Like a house, there are several components to building a good and stable structure. One is that you need a solid foundation. Without a solid foundation, the structure will collapse. It could not support itself without a solid foundation. There are two things this passage reveals about the foundation, or supporting structure, of the Church. There are the apostles and prophets, and there is Jesus Christ. The apostles and prophets may represent the authoritative teachings they communicated to the Church. They were “foundational” because they proclaimed the very words of God, they shared the Gospel with those who became “fellow citizens” and “members of the household of God”, and some of their words became the books of the New Testament. God used the apostles and prophets as a foundation to start His Church and build it with more disciples. Since a “foundation” of a building is laid only once, at the beginning of building, some see their function of speaking the words of God as being replaced by the written Word of God. The foundation of the Church is revealed in the very words of God.

While God used the apostles and prophets as a foundation, the cornerstone, however, the one upon whom the whole structure is built and held together, is Jesus Christ. In ancient times, when no mortar was used in building something, stones had to be cut and smoothed so they would fit exactly with one another. The cornerstone was the first stone laid and it was the critical stone in the corner of the foundation that ensured that a building was square and stable. Everything else in the structure was lined up to the cornerstone. The apostles and prophets, as the foundation of the Church, depend on Christ for their alignment. Christ is the one on whom the whole Church stands. Every individual God uses to build His Church is fitted together by being aligned with the chief cornerstone, Jesus Christ. That means that if a Church moves away from Jesus, or seeks any other supporting structure, whether it is tradition or culture or their own desires, it will fail. If we ever take our eyes off of Jesus, our cornerstone, we will fall as the Church of God. Everything must be about Christ, after all, this is His Body.

### **God Grows His Church into a Temple**

Being citizens and members of God’s household means we have been brought into a new relationship with God. Being the Church means we are built upon the foundation of the first disciples, with Christ as the chief supporting component of the building. Being the Church also means that God’s work on us is not complete. While we are built on Christ and His Word, we are also *being built*. This means God is still working on us. We are like a project that is not yet complete. Look at the last two verses of this passage.

***Ephesians 2:21-22*** <sup>21</sup> *in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.* <sup>22</sup> *In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

One thing to recognize is that not only is Jesus the cornerstone of the Church, He is also the Master-Builder of the project. He is the Architect. Christ is the one building the Church as He desires. The next thing we should notice is what Christ is building. We are not only called the Church or the household of God, but we are also called a *holy temple*. In the Old Testament, the Temple was the place where God met with His people in joyful worship and fellowship. It was the place of God's presence. In King Solomon's time and following, the Temple was a magnificent structure that was seen as God's dwelling place. God's temple was the Temple in Jerusalem, but it is now the temple of the Church. Believers today do not have to worship in Jerusalem, or anywhere else, because they themselves have become the new temple of God. God's new Temple is not a structure made of wood, brick or stone, but it is a structure made up of each individual person as "living stones" who have surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ.

Another thing we should notice is that God's project of building this new temple is not complete. Paul wrote that we are "being joined together," and "being built together," and growing. This indicates that God's work of building the Church is not complete. The Church is a *work in progress*, just as we are each a work in progress. God is not finished with us yet. He is putting His Church together to become something beautiful. Each member of the Church is joined with the rest of the Church. This implies that the joining is not complete as each believer adopted into God's family is joined to the Church. This is a picture of a Church in the process of expansion and growth. This is a picture of a building that is under construction. Remember, it took seven years for King Solomon to build the Temple in his time. According to the Jews who spoke to Jesus during His temple cleansing (John 2:20), it took forty-six years to build Herod's temple in Jerusalem. Building a temple takes time and effort, just as building the Church does. God is still bringing others into His Body. He is still adding living stones to the structure.

God is also still working on us. None of us have completely grown up. None of us have arrived, but each of us is in the process of growing into a holy temple of God. This is a process called *sanctification*. This is the process of the Holy Spirit conforming each of us into the image of Jesus Christ. Every believer is a citizen of God's Kingdom. Every believer is a member of God's family. Every believer is a stone being cut and smoothed to fit perfectly in the whole structure that God is building. This is also where discipleship is used, where God uses us to help each other to grow in our faith and walk with Christ. We should all be growing in our relationship with Christ and we should all be helping each other grow in a relationship with Christ. This is where knowing God's Word and teaching His Word to each other is so necessary. This is where praying for and with one another is so necessary. This is where encouraging and sometimes rebuking one another is so necessary. We each need to be tools that God uses to help others grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. Are you allowing God to use you?

## Conclusion

In closing, God is building something wonderful. It is called the Church. He has laid the foundation. He has placed the cornerstone. He has assembled living stones of this structure, and He is adding more. God is the Master-builder Who is building His Church,

but He is using us to do the work. Each of God's people has a responsibility to build up and disciple others. While, discipleship begins in the home, it does not end there. Each person in the Church has the opportunity to help shape the future of other members of the household of God. Each one of us ought to support and help each other by teaching and modeling Jesus Christ. God's work of building His Temple includes us. Next week, we will look at furnishing the Temple, meaning equipping the saints for ministry. Are you on board with this project? May it be so! Amen!