

Ephesians 2.19-22

A Dwelling Place for God (Part 1)

In 2 Samuel 7 we read about a turning point in human history, “instruction for mankind.” David has been elevated to the throne of Israel and Judah. God has given him victory over his enemies all around. His kingdom is well established, with a beautiful palace of cedar to underscore the strength of his court. But a thought occurs to David, which he shares with Nathan the prophet. “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.” David has it in his heart to build a house, a palace, for God. Initially, Nathan gives David his blessing and tells him to do all that is in his heart. But God reveals to Nathan that it is not for *David* to build a house for God, but for one of David’s *sons*. Then *God* promises to build a house for David. But by “house” God does not mean another palace of cedar or of ivory, but an everlasting dynasty, indeed, a King to reign on David’s throne forever. The beauty is that Christ wonderfully fulfills both of these promises. That is, Christ fulfills the promise to David that He will build David a house. Christ is the Son of David who sits on David’s throne forever—God built a permanent house for David. In addition, Christ is also the Son of David who builds a house for God. Solomon built the Lord a house of fine cut stones and costly cedar, but that was not a house that could endure. In fact it was often plundered by Judah’s own kings in order to pay off their oppressors. In 586 B.C. Solomon’s temple was destroyed by the Babylonians. It was rebuilt years later, but not filled with the glory of the Lord, and not rivaling the beauty of Solomon’s original temple. Even Herod’s enlargement and beautification of the temple could not make it shine with the luster of the glory of God. No, it was not Herod, or Ezra, or even Solomon, who would build God’s house. It would have to be one greater than Solomon to build the house that God had in mind when He spoke to David. And Christ, the greater than Solomon has done just that. **Christ has built a house for God—the Church.** What kind of house has Christ built for God? Our text reveals at least four truths about the Church as the dwelling place of God. We will look at two of these truths this morning and two next Sunday. **The Church is a close yet universal community. The Church is a sturdy community. The Church is a holy community. The Church is a Trinitarian community.**

The Church is a close yet universal community (2.19, 21, 22). You’re not alone in Christ. Although you are not alone, you may struggle with loneliness. Now, in one sense, we can say that we are never alone because God is always with us. “I will never leave you or forsake you” (Heb 13.5). Yet, one of the aspects of being made in God’s image, and one of the ways that we glorify God, is by living in community with other human beings. Remember, God said of Adam, “It is not good for man to be alone.” Now this does not mean that Adam could not be satisfied in his fellowship with God, but that God intended to reveal His glory, not just in humans, but in human community. Adam and Eve formed a perfect community, that is, until sin entered the picture. Sin brought alienation between the pair and God as well as between the man and the woman. Once they realized they were naked, they no longer trusted each other. So, with no one else around, they tried to hide their vulnerability from each other. The very next story of humanity, the story of Cain and Abel, ends in murder and social alienation. And so the story has continued into our day. For all of the social networking that goes on, and all of the

coffee shop hangouts, people are still lonely and estranged from one another. One social analyst defined loneliness as “perceived social isolation, [which] can occur even when one is surrounded by people.” (L. Gregory Jones “You’re Lonely, I’m Lonely”). This isolation is not just the result of a psychological disorder or neurosis; it is the estrangement of distrust and even hatred that is rooted in our sin. But now, in Christ, you are not alone; and you can combat loneliness with this truth. “You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow-citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” You are “joined together” and “being built together” by Christ.

When we speak of reconciliation in theology, we usually have in mind the peace that is made between God and man. But there is also a reconciliation that takes place within redeemed humanity as well. “No longer strangers and aliens” describes not only our newfound peace with God in Christ, but also a new relationship with other believers in Christ. This is why Paul follows this “no longer” statement with a positive description of our new life in the words “fellow citizens with the saints.” In Christ we have entered a new fellowship, or new community that is deeply rooted with a large embrace. The saints include the Old Testament believers, as well as all believers since the resurrection of Christ. Because you are in Christ, you are a fellow-citizen with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. King David wrote songs for you to sing. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel saw visions and spoke and wrote prophecies for you. You are a fellow-citizen with Paul. And you are fellow-citizens with believers in China and Africa and with the spirits of the righteous made perfect in heaven.

Now, citizenship comes with certain privileges. Paul knew this well. As a Roman citizen, he had certain rights. When he was beaten and thrown in prison without a trial he asked the jailor if it was just to beat a Roman citizen without a trial. When the jailor learned that Paul was a citizen, he immediately reported it to the rulers of the city, who trembled, because they knew they had done wrong. Paul made them come and give him a public apology. Later, Paul again used the privilege of Roman citizenship when he could not get a fair trial on Jewish soil, so he appealed to Caesar for justice. As Christians, we are citizens of a heavenly city. We do not enjoy all of the privileges of that citizenship yet, but we do have advantages as fellow-citizens with the saints. We have “access by one Spirit to the Father” (2.18). We have the privilege to pray in the name of the Son of God. He has told us to approach the Father in His name!! We have the privilege to call on God as Father. We have the privilege of being addressed by God personally in His Word, the Bible. We have the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, to lead us into the Truth of God’s Word—to disclose to us the things concerning Christ. We have a family—brothers and sisters—in Christ.

Paul points to this privilege when he says, “members of the household of God.” Not only are we fellow-citizens, we are part of a family. This is a very distinct and well defined community. Its contours are defined by Christ. Only those who are in Christ are in this family. But it is also a very large family, because it embraces believers all over the world and throughout the ages. “The household of God” speaks of the intimacy believers share with one another. We are not mere acquaintances. We are members of a family. Paul says in verse twenty-one that we are “being joined together,” and in verse twenty-two that we are “being built together.” This language speaks of the corporate unity of the people of God. Christians are not intended to be solitary saints. We were created for community. Redemption restores that community.

How is this unity of the universal Church to be seen? It is seen in the close relationships we enjoy at the local Church. It is seen in the filial connections we maintain with other churches. It is seen in the partnerships we form for the sake of the gospel, as we take the gospel to the nations. In the fall we will

be starting back with our Covenant Groups. This is our small group ministry, which is a great place for you to build close relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ and to grow together in Christ. We also have men's and women's Bible studies, where you can fellowship with fellow-believers over the Word of God. Worshiping together is another way to grow together. Not only is corporate worship an expression of unity, as we join hearts and voices together for the single purpose of glorifying God, it is also a catalyst for unity. Partnerships in witness and service are perfect opportunities to strengthen the bonds of affection and express the Church's unity. When you learn of needs in the body of Christ it is healthy to show concern and step up to help. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. One of the richest experiences we can share together outside of corporate worship and Bible study is evangelism. Those of you on the EE visitation teams can probably attest to the joyful fellowship you share as you work together to make Christ known in our community. These are just some of the ways that we experience and express the close bonds of the Church as the household of God. The Church is a close yet universal community.

The Church is a sturdy community (2.20). The Leaning Tower of Pisa was intended to be a marvel of architectural beauty and ingenuity. Instead, it has become the perfect illustration of a foundational faux pas. With everything around us in constant flux—the government, the economy, our health, social mores, and so on—a community needs stability to weather the velocity of the winds of chaos. What is to keep the Church from sinking into the moral morass of our culture? What is to keep us standing together in the face of persecution, ridicule, and the allure of social acceptance or intellectual approval from the cultured despisers of religion? How will our house stand when the tsunami of the world comes crashing down? Paul's answer: you are “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone.”

“The apostles” were the official spokesmen of Christ. These were not ordinary missionaries and preachers. These men were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ. They were endowed by Christ with the authority to speak for Him and to represent Him among the nations. In 2 Corinthians 5.20 Paul referred to the Apostles as “ambassadors for Christ.” This statement that the apostles are the foundation of the Church is reminiscent of Jesus' statement to Peter, after Peter had confessed “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus said, “Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you (in other words, this was not something that Peter arrived at by his own religious insight or philosophical reasoning), but My Father in heaven.” Because of this divine revelation Jesus said, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16.17-18). The same truth is envisioned in Revelation 21. There John sees the New Jerusalem, God's people, and describes “the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Rev 21.14). The apostles, in their office as official spokesmen for Christ and who preach Christ, are foundational to the Church.

The other group mentioned was “the prophets.” Now, it is possible that the prophets are the authors of the Old Testament, who did indeed bear witness to Christ. It is more likely, however, that Paul is referring to New Testament prophets. In 3.5 Paul refers to these same officers of the Church: “When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets.”

Clearly, in these verses both apostles and prophets are ministers of the New Covenant, and not the Old Testament prophets. In 4.11 Paul names several types of ministers in the Church, beginning with “the apostles” and “the prophets.” In 1 Corinthians 12.28 Paul said, “And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, etc.” In this list, only the first three are numbered, suggesting their importance in the life of the church. Just as in Ephesians 4, Paul has Apostles and Prophets first. These prophets were the heirs of the Old Testament prophets. They, along with the apostles, had a foundational ministry in the early Church and for the church of all generations. These offices, of apostle and prophet, do not continue beyond the apostolic era. They were foundational, and left us their deposit in the writings of the New Testament.

There are those who call themselves “apostles” and “prophets” today, but they are self-appointed or merely appointed by men. Those who call themselves apostles and prophets today are either using these terms with a definition different than the NT, or they are assuming an authority and ability that no one should presume to possess. In fact, I would warn that those who claim this power for themselves are sinister. For they presume to be able to speak for God apart from the authority of Scripture.

The NT prophets were associates of the apostles who preached the gospel and instructed the infant Gentile Church in the faith. Both apostles and prophets were foundational because of the message they preached. They taught Christ. Thus Paul’s next phrase: “Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone.” The cornerstone was a massive foundation stone whose angles were the standard for the rest of the foundation. So every other stone in the foundation had to be in line and level with the cornerstone. Jesus is the cornerstone. His life, death, resurrection, ascension, present reign, second coming, and His teaching define everything that the apostles and prophets taught and define the entire structure of the Church. Not only is Christ the head of His body, the Church. He is also the foundation of the temple, His Church.

Because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever, we have a sure foundation. We have a fixed point, as Francis Schaeffer put it. In a world where everything is relative when judged merely in relation to other created things, we have a fixed point that gives objectivity and absolute truth and meaning and goodness—an anchor for the soul. Where do we find the apostolic witness to Christ? Why in the Bible of course! Both the Old and New Testaments bear witness to Christ. We cannot do without them. The Bible is our objective source of knowledge about God and His works. We must never depart from this foundation.

The author of Hebrews begins his exposition with the fact that God has spoken finally and fully in the person of Jesus Christ. The Apostolic record, which is called the New Testament, is the Holy Spirit’s testimony to Christ. So the eyes of our hearts behold Christ as we hear the witness of the Spirit through the Apostles’ writings. We must never depart from the foundation of Scripture. Because God has revealed the saving knowledge of Christ in the Scriptures we must learn to be good listeners. How many times did Jesus say, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” Jesus’ messages to the churches in Revelation each end with the refrain, “he who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Jesus told the disciples in the farewell discourse in the gospel of John “abide in My Word” and spoke of His Word abiding in them. The emptiness of the world leaves us weightlessly flitting about

without any direction, except that on our own we inevitably go to destruction. Christ is our gravity, our weightiness that grounds us firmly, and leads us in paths of righteousness for His name's sake—He leads us in His everlasting way.

As a minister of the Word in Christ's Church, I ask that you pray for me as I determine to teach the whole counsel of God without shrinking back in a culture hostile to God and His revelation. I appeal to our Ruling Elders, defend the flock of God. Do not be idle when the foundations are being attacked. Keep the Church, in all of her courts and ministries, faithful to the apostolic deposit, faithful to the Cornerstone. God would not have His house, His holy temple, to be a leaning tower. He would not see His house washed out to sea when the storm rages. The Church has a foundation. Let us not build on any other. Beloved, do not build your lives, and let us not build our lives together on any other foundation.

Realize that everything in life comes back to the Cornerstone, who is Christ. When Paul counsels husbands and wives regarding marriage, he does so by pointing them to Christ and His Church. When Paul instructs the children, he does so "in the LORD." When he speaks to servants, he appeals to them on the foundation of their relationship with Christ, as servants of Christ (6.6). When he addressed the masters about their dealings with their servants, he pointed them to "He who is both their Master and yours [who] is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with Him" (6.9). When fighting the devil, or sin, or temptation, Paul tells us to stand firm, not in our strength, but in the strength of the Lord, clothed in gospel armor. Wherever you are in life, and whatever it is that you face, trace the line back to Christ, and you will find a foundation that is sure. Take your stand there. The winds will still howl about you. The waves of distress will still crash against you. Billows may roll over your head. But the house on the rock stood firm.

"Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12.28-29).