

We The Church: The Dwelling Place of God

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[0:00] Well, if you turn in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 2, I'm going to be focusing on verses 20, 21, and 22.

But I just want to let you know this past fall, Jenny and I got away for a couple days on a weekend. And Jenny's my wife. And we went down to Chicago. And one of the highlights of our time in Chicago was taking an architectural tour on the Chicago River.

And the lady that was given the guide, she was just brilliant and articulate and just... We learned so much about architecture in general. In Chicago, architecture in particular, it was really sweet. We learned that in 1871 at the Chicago Fire, the city was basically razed to rubble. And so Chicago needed to be rebuilt. But it couldn't be spread out.

It needed to be built up. And so one guy, Louis Sullivan, the father of the skyscraper, he came on the scene and he designed some buildings that are still standing in Chicago today.

[1:09] And he was known for coining the expression, form follows function. This morning, I get to bring you on an architectural tour of a different type.

We're not going to look at multiple buildings. We're going to look at one particular structure. A temple. The temple of the living God.

The church. The triune God is the great architect. And he has designed a particular building composed of particular people with a particular purpose.

Our form has a function. And so this morning, what I want to impress upon you through God's word is that together, Christ the King Church, we are the holy dwelling place of the living God.

We are one holy temple in which God dwells. Our relationships form a holy habitation for the living God.

[2:17] So if I were to sum up the point in just a few words, it would be this. Brothers and sisters, we are the dwelling place of God.

We are. So at the very outset, I want to ask you this question. We're going to see God pictured in Ephesians 2 as a master builder.

Are you joining him in the work he is doing? Or are you somehow resisting his work? Are you trying to tear down or slow down the work of our great stonemason Jesus?

This morning, we're continuing our series on the church. And if you haven't been with us recently, the New Testament paints these wonderful pictures of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And there's a variety of them. And so we're talking about the church as the blood-bought people of God indwelt by the Holy Spirit on mission for Christ.

[3:26] And so far, we have seen the church as the flock of God. One flock following after one shepherd. We've seen the church as one bride exclusively devoted to one bridegroom.

And this morning, we're going to see the church as one temple built on one cornerstone with one purpose. Did you know that when you walked in here this morning, you were walking into a people, the very dwelling place of the living God?

Our God dwells in our midst. And so, we're going to look at a passage at the end of Ephesians 2.

And I'm fully aware that when I preach a sermon like this, it kind of feels like you're parachuting into a part of the Bible that you may not have kind of your bearings on.

So, let me give you some bearings on where we're at in the book of Ephesians. Just by way of kind of bringing us up to Ephesians chapter 2, verses 20 through 22.

In Ephesians 1, 3 through 14, Paul helps us understand that the triune God has this plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in heaven and earth in Christ.

[4:47] And part of what he's uniting is a people. Very diverse people. People who may have conflicting experiences.

Even hostility. And this great plan of the triune God is a plan to unite new people together in Christ. In verses 15 through 22, Paul prays for the Ephesian church and he prays that they would be able to comprehend the immeasurable power of God towards them in Christ Jesus.

And then in chapter 2, verses 1 through 10, Paul explains this power on display. And taking an enemy of God, someone who's walking in darkness, who has been separated from God, who is under God's wrath, and how God in His glorious, gracious power takes someone who is running the other way and by His grace draws them near.

But God, chapter 2, verse 4, by His grace made us alive in Christ Jesus. And so what we see happening in chapter 2, verses 1 through 10 is this, where we start off as children under God's wrath, we end up in verse 10 as His workmanship.

It's the word we get poem from. We are His craftsmanship, trophies of grace. And so what chapter 2, 1 through 10 points us to is this glorious, peacemaking, reconciling work God does by His grace vertically between God and sinners, taking people who are spiritually dead and making them spiritually alive.

[6:31] And then, in 2, 11 through 22, where our few verses lie, God changes, moves from this vertical relationship to a horizontal relationship.

Paul starts explaining in verses 11 through 22 how those who've been made alive through Christ and made right with God, peace with God, they have also been made to be at peace with one another.

And so where chapter 2, 1 through 10 is this vertical relationship with God, 2, 11 through 22 is this horizontal relationship between Christians.

And so in 2, 11 you read, therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, at one time way back in the day before you met Jesus, you were separated, alienated, you are without hope, without God in the world.

And then in verse 13 we read, but now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. And then he goes on to say in verse 14, for he himself is our peace.

[7:38] Do you see the word our? Paul is talking about himself as a Jew and these Gentile Ephesians. He's saying we're all one now. Now here's what I want you to see.

In verse 14 we read this, for he himself is our peace who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.

Now look at verse 15. By abolishing the laws of commandments expressed in ordinances that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two.

So making peace. Look at verse 16. And might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

And if you look down at verse 18, for through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father. We're in a passage talking about the unity of the church.

[8:35] Oneness. Paul is making the case that God by his great grace has called sinners not only to be at peace with him but to be at peace with one another in Christ.

He has made them one new people. He's taken unbelieving Jews and made some of those unbelieving Jews his own. And he's taken some unbelieving Gentiles and he's made them his own. And he's united these different people into one new man. And this was all according to God's plan for the fullness of time.

To unite all things in Christ. Christ. So as we get to verse 19 Paul begins to wrap up the whole section on the unity of the church.

He says so then you are no longer strangers and aliens you no longer are away from God and away from other saints but you are fellow citizens with the saints all who believe in Jesus and members of the household of God part of his family.

[9:45] And then when we get to verse 20 Paul shifts the metaphor. He starts talking about a building. He says 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.

when we what I want you to see this morning one cornerstone one structure and one purpose one function.

So from these three verses I want you to help you to see we are the dwelling place of God Christ the King Church built on one foundation being formed into one structure and I've been given one purpose one function.

So let me now direct you to this one foundation in which we have been built upon. It's in verse 20 we read this built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

we all know that a foundation is absolutely essential to any building. A foundation is critical to a building stability its unity its form its definition remember Matthew chapter 7 Jesus is wrapping up the Sermon on the Mount and he's wrapping up his teaching and he says whoever hears my words and does them he's like he's like a builder who builds his house on the rock.

[11:41] Now when we when you look at verse 20 and you read built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets that might be a little surprising to some of you. You're like foundation how can the foundation be anything but Jesus?

Who are these apostles and prophets anyway? Well I don't want to get into too great a detail but the apostles and prophets that Paul is talking about are people in the first century who had been gifted and given a particular role.

Both these apostles and prophets had something in common. It was a unique ministry a unique ministry of proclamation and if you want to see that spelled out look at look at chapter 3 and verses 5 and 4 and 5 Paul is saying when you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ which was not made known to the sons of men and other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the spirit and these holy apostles and prophets are making known this mystery that God has kept hidden for the ages until this time and that mystery is in verse 6 this mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs members of the same body the same building and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel so what you need to understand about these apostles and prophets they go unnamed here it's more about what they do and why they're foundational they are declaring

Christ as the unifier of all things a unifier of a people into one new man essentially they are pointing to Jesus and make no mistake about it Jesus plays a unique role Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone Paul is very clear in the language Jesus himself and no other is the cornerstone of the church a cornerstone was the most important stone of a first century foundation it was the first stone to be laid and often times there are just these massive blocks of stone put down as a cornerstone it would bear the weight of a structure as it was built up and built out a cornerstone was the unifier of a corner of a building itself you build up on a cornerstone and it's where two walls become one structure it's a unifier a cornerstone would also kind of determine the shape of the building its initial footprint of what it would look like and so you could say this that everything depended on the cornerstone everything was united by the cornerstone everything was shaped by the cornerstone the cornerstone defined everything about a building on our building this building there's a cornerstone right on that corner out there and it gives some definition to who this what this building is tells of the date it was built 1874 says a couple other things too it doesn't bear any weight it's mainly aesthetic what Paul is clearly stating here is that a local church must be founded on Christ

Jesus alone and here's what this means for us no matter what we do as a church we never outgrow our cornerstone everything we do is built on that cornerstone all of our preaching is cornerstone preaching all of our teaching cornerstone teaching our children's ministry is a cornerstone children's ministry our life groups are cornerstone ministries everything that we do depends on determined by shaped by existing for the cornerstone it's who defines us as a church now the risk of a metaphor like this is to start imagining Jesus as some kind of lifeless block but we all know that he's alive this cornerstone is not a lifeless block this cornerstone is a living cornerstone and on this living cornerstone

[16:49] God is building a living structure so we've looked at our one cornerstone now let's look at this one structure because brothers and sisters we are the dwelling place of God so in 21 and 22 we have a very interesting way of communicating in the Bible it's called a parallelism don't worry you're not going to get quizzed on that but here's how you can see it in 21 it begins with in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord and then in 22 it starts with in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the spirit they parallel each other and in fact the verse 21 in whom in the verse 22 in him in Greek are identical phrases and they're both referring back to the cornerstone

Jesus and what they're saying is on him and by him this structure is being built did you see those two phrases being joined together together in verse 21 and being built together in verse 22 those are present tense verbs and here's why that matters it's a work in progress we are a work in progress Christ the King Church and so here's the picture that's being portrayed our risen Lord Jesus is like a stone mason who is fitting a people together into one structure have you ever seen a stone mason at work well here's what they do they first select the right stones and then after they pick the stones they prepare those stones and after they prepare those stones they start fitting those stones into a particular structure and often times that fitting regards sanding and chipping and cutting so that that stone fits into the rest of the structure and then that stone mason sets the stone in place there is a house on 75th street and 18th avenue it's on the northwest corner I passed it this morning on my way here and it looks like the stones that make up this house were literally taken out of Lake Michigan 80 years ago every stone that makes up this house is unique and yet each has been carefully placed together to form one building one house made up of many stones when we talk about the church as a building under construction it's a metaphor and the stones they represent individual Christians it's what Peter calls in 1st Peter living stones stones and what we're seeing here is that Jesus our great stone mason what he's doing is he is intentionally selecting preparing fitting and setting into place particular stones into a particular structure and if you want to get theological about it it goes something like this before the foundation of the world God the Father selected the stones for the building and then Jesus by his blood prepared each stone for use and then our Lord Jesus is purposely fitting shaping readying positioning particular stones to be placed into a particular structure and then he sets them in place it's his doing every Christian is a living stone with a place among God's people you have a fitting place brother and sister our great stone mason he he takes all things into consideration when he fits and joins his living stones together our great stone mason actually chooses to use a variety of stones to build one structure that's what he was doing in first century

Ephesus our Lord Jesus was building one structure out of two very different people culturally Jews and Gentiles there was known hostility between them and the Lord Jesus brought peace to them through his blood making them into one new man so that's why in verse 21 Paul begins with in whom the whole structure is being joined together Jews and Gentiles and then in verse 22 he narrows it down to saying in him you you converted Gentiles are being built into the church into this building together what he's saying is he's singling out these people who may not have been felt feeling like they were a part of God's people God's plan for the fullness of time was to reveal a mystery through the church to make his wisdom known and that wisdom that mystery is bringing together a people who would otherwise not want anything to do with each other and bring them together into one united people through

[23:06] Christ God our Lord Jesus is intentionally selecting living stones who were separated and hostile to each other at one point prepares them he fits them and he sets them together and it speaks a word about our great God the great stone maker intentionally chooses stones of different colors different textures different shapes and sizes from different quarries and he brings them together fit together as one multicultural temple for God to dwell in together it's glorious work he's doing Jesus is in the business of uniting people who would otherwise not like each other who would otherwise avoid each other ignore each other write each other off here's what this means for us maybe you're in the

room here and you're thinking well

I need to be a Caucasian in order to be a part of Christ the King Church in order for me to feel like I fit into Christ the King Church I need to be a certain skin color well it's not true because Jesus the great stone maker Mason he's bringing in different stones from different shapes and sizes and colors it's all to array his structure because he has a purpose the form serves a function rather if you're aware of your ethnicity when we gather together could it be that Jesus has you here to set you in this people for a purpose maybe maybe the issue you feel out of place not so much because of your ethnicity but more because you're like

I have no church background everybody around here when the pastor says open up your Bible they know right where to go I have no idea where to go and you can start feeling like you don't belong you don't fit in because you don't have a working knowledge of the Bible you don't have this history in the church well it's just not true the great stone mason Jesus he doesn't include you as part of his building because of your experience with the church he includes you in his building through his blood so if you think you need to become more churchy in order to fit into Christ the king church it's just not true you have a fitting place here and this building will benefit from your being placed in our midst or maybe it's something like this you think you need to have your act together you look around you and you and you're like oh

I'm not like that sharp dude I'm not like that lovely gal and you think you feel out of place because you're like if you knew my life if you knew my history if you knew what what's behind me no no not like that all of us need help none of us has their act together the only thing you need in order to be part of God's temple is to be purchased by the blood of Jesus that's what you need you don't need to act together you don't have to become more churchy you don't have to become white in fact we believe that the greater diversity brings greater richness to our gathering our Lord Jesus Christ is fitting together men and women from different even hostile backgrounds opposing cultures and conflicting experiences and he's building one new structure through his blood

I just want to remind you that those phrases being joined together and being built together well they're in the present tense it's a work our Lord Jesus is doing among us now in this city we're not where we want to be but Jesus is working on that he's growing us and he's diversifying us slowly he's he's getting us in close proximity to one another of different backgrounds so that we can learn from one another do you know how to get in close proximity to somebody who's unlike you use your dinner table invite them over invite yourself over to someone's house get close to one another you have so much in common if you're both blood bought so

[28:51] Christ the King Church if you're hearing what I'm saying if if what we're reading here is true are you ready to welcome people into close proximity who are different than you who may not look like you who may not have the same tastes as you lifestyle as you or background as you are you ready are you ready to welcome them because Jesus is bringing them and he wants to join them to us through his blood our great stonemason is actively at work bringing people and fitting them and setting them into this particular temple Christ the King Church use your dinner table wouldn't it be great three or five seven years from now that when you pan over our church and when you see the leadership team of our church our leadership team is marked by a diversification of culture and experience our deacons and our life group leaders our worship leaders our volunteers there's just greater and greater diversity because our

Lord Jesus the great stonemason is bringing different stones and setting them in place we have one cornerstone and we have one structure our Lord Jesus is building us together which brings me to the last point we have one function we are the dwelling place of God one cornerstone one structure one function our Lord Jesus is forming us together for a purpose and that purpose is clued in with the word into look at verse 21 in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord look at verse 22 in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the spirit now what you need to understand is that the function for which

Jesus is joining us all together and building us is not to be an entertainment center we know that it's not to be a self-help center we know that it's not to be a keep up with the Joneses center we know that our Lord Jesus is fitting us together into a temple do you know what a temple is it's a place of worship where people would come offer sacrifice offer prayers sing praises in Ephesus at this time

that Paul wrote this the temple of Artemis was standing it was one of the seven wonders of the world and it was a huge money maker for that local economy at the same time Jerusalem the temple that Herod the Great had built it was still standing it only had a couple years before be raised in 70 but it was still standing too both temples were temples built by human hands but what's remarkable about this is this temple that is being talked about by

Paul is a temple being built with the hands of our great stonemason Jesus into one new man the word holy means to be distinct set apart set apart from common use and set apart for sacred use the blood of Jesus has set all of us apart from the world in order in order to be set apart for God and together we live distinct lives for our Lord Jesus Christ and what sets us apart is the one who dwells in our midst we are being joined together into a holy temple being built together into the dwelling place of God by the Spirit God dwells in our midst

Christ the King Church God is present among us by the Holy Spirit Christ the King Church what's interesting is that Paul is writing to Gentiles and these Gentiles in the first century were fully aware that the temple in Jerusalem they had a certain section only for Gentiles and they could go no more further into the temple well here what's being said is you are the temple you are the temple of God the dwelling place of God in the Bible is a story of God dwelling with his people in his place starts off in Genesis God dwelling with Adam and Eve in the garden he soon kicks them out because of their disobedience God goes on to dwell with Israel in the tabernacle that fancy tent that was mobile in Exodus into Joshua God with his people as they go to the promised land but that fancy tent doesn't last because when they get in the promised land a temple is built by Solomon and in 1 Kings 8 [34:47] God comes and dwells take us up residence in that temple in a special way and he fills it with his presence but that doesn't last either that temple gets raised and if you fast forward to John chapter 1 verse 14 the word became flesh and dwelt among us the Lord Jesus is God present with his people but Jesus was crucified dead raised and ascended and on Pentecost God by his Holy Spirit came to dwell in his new temple his people the church and that's where we are now we are the residents of God we are the dwelling place of God but just truth and advertising it's not going to stay this way because when Jesus comes back he's going to make all things right he's going to recreate the heavens and the earth the new Jerusalem will descend and what Revelation 21-22 makes clear is this there will be no temple in the new Jerusalem because the temple is the Lord God

Almighty and the Lamb no more need we will see him face to face here's the point God has always intended to dwell with his people and he dwells in us in a most special way now and here's how I want to apply it because a holy God is dwelling in our midst it makes a difference in how we relate with one another our relationships with one another must be marked more and more by holiness regardless of if you're the same color of people or different color of people same economic income or different same education level or different what I'm about to describe to you is the holiness that befits us as the dwelling place of God if you turn to

Ephesians chapter 4 verse 25 here's how we're going to apply this because God is in our midst we put away falsehood and we speak the truth with one another for we are members of one another living stones set together our proximity is designed to give grace to one another in 426 and 27 we don't get sinfully angry with one another we're quick to make peace with one another because that's holiness in relationships in 428 we don't steal we share with one another because that's holiness lived out in relationships in verse 29 we don't speak corrupt talk with one another we don't tear each other down with our words we build one another up with our words as fits the occasion giving grace to those who hear that's holiness lived out in relationships 429 we are said told we do this so as not to grieve the Holy Spirit who we were sealed for the day of redemption who dwells in us and if there is this pinnacle of holiness it's in 5 1 and 2 there we're told be imitators of God be holy as I am holy as beloved children and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God the ultimate expression of holy relationships is loving one another we are the dwelling place of God

I've tried to show you our one cornerstone Jesus he's alive we are his one structure living stones being built up intentionally diverse and we have one function to be the dwelling place of God and to live out the holiness that he has made us to be these truths are to shape the way we think about

ourselves these truths are to stir our feelings to want us to pursue holiness with one another and they're to shape our priorities I want to close this morning by praying what I want to pray a Pauline prayer can I show you from this text Paul has just been talking about this holy dwelling place we are his temple and he wraps up in 22 in verse chapter 3 verse 1

Paul says for this reason I Paul a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles and then he interrupts himself he's talking about God's wisdom on display through the church and then he comes back in verse 14 he picks up where he left off in verse 1 for this reason I bow my knees before the father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith that you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend together with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge and that you may be filled with all the fullness of God he prays that the Holy Spirit would impress upon us who our Lord Jesus is and the great love with which he loves us and that is not only to unite us it's to fill us and to that end let me close in prayer

[41:10] Lord Jesus our great cornerstone the great builder of the church the one the one in whom has made it all possible Lord Jesus would you do a great work in us Father would you pour out your Holy Spirit upon us that you would strengthen our inner beings by faith that Christ would dwell in our hearts individually and corporately and that we would have the strength to comprehend all of us together the glory of your love for us your multi dimensional love for us and that love for us would fill us and strengthen us and unite us Spirit of the living God would you fall upon us and fill us afresh we ask this in your name amen so you you you come and come in you