

Why Church?

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Date: 12 September 2010

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And so for us called to in the church. It will also mean weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice. This builds up. Paul said this three chapters ago in chapter 12, 15, and it looks like being with people in the ups and downs of their life and praying in a heartfelt way for people in the church at these times. Now, the only way we can be part of people's lives in those times is if we have received them into our own lives, if we have welcomed them in such a way that you can be part of their grief and part of their joy as well. There is an openness in relationship that takes place in a church where you are seeking to build others up. And I want to say that a lot of this exercise can be very inconvenient, this exercise that brings spiritual health, inconvenient and messy.

[1 5 : 0 0] My boys, who are five and eight years old, love to build with Lego, and they build the most fantastic creation. It is amazing to see. However, once in a while, when my boys are building downstairs in the family room, I will hear a sudden expression of anger and frustration and exasperation. And I'll go down thinking there's a fight starting between the two of them. And I will find that they are exasperated because a Lego piece is not fitting in the way that they think it should fit. Or they are trying to break the laws of physics, you know, by building roofs without any supports or trying to manipulate a piece so that it will do what it never was intended to do. And so what they are needing is a little guidance and help at this point. And they are needing patience as well. And I think this is a picture for us because when we serve people, we can be very tempted to give up in exasperation. It can be maddening to be building one another up. My building might not be getting the results I'm hoping for right away. And we constantly need to look beyond ourselves to be on the right track, to know really in God's eyes what it is that is the real good for that person we are building up. What is it that God wants you to do for that person? And the wonderful thing about Romans is that it is about grace. So Paul doesn't just say, you know, just, just do it, just work really hard and do what I'm telling you to do.

That's very difficult thing of building each other up. What he does, as he, as he always does, is he says, first look at Jesus. He says, he says to, to worship Jesus and to see him have a vision of who he is in your heart and mind. And that's why he says in verse three, for Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me. That's from, uh, that's from Psalm 69.

And what it says there is that Jesus served God, the father, as he took on himself, all of the reproach of people, all of people's sin, all of the rebellion against God. And he took it on himself.

And in this way, he served us as well, because it was our sin against God that fell on him. Well, that's the good news. This is Jesus. We belong to him. We are in his family because he served us on the cross. And so we serve because we belong to one who has served us. We build up because the, the risen Lord Jesus builds us up and makes us acceptable to God, a royal priesthood. You see, the grace of Jesus overflows into our lives as his good news fills our minds. That's why the gospel of Jesus needs to be central in everything that we do here in the church. It is essential for us to be able to build other people up. And that's what also why Paul goes to God's word in verse four.

He says, not only do you look at Jesus life, the gospel, you look at the testimony to Jesus in the rest of the Bible, the old Testament to receive all you need to be built up yourself. Look at verse four.

[18 : 35] It says, for whatever was written in former days, what was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope.

You see what Paul's saying? He says that the Bible gives you hope. And that hope is this. At one time, we were separated from Jesus. And this is what Paul teaches in Ephesians. We had no hope. We are without God in the world. And now in Jesus, you who were once far off are brought near, near to God by the blood of Jesus. He himself is our peace and has made us both one. He's talking about the Jew and the Gentile. He's talking about the Roman, the church in Rome there. He says, Jesus has brought us both one.

And the Romans were experiencing that hope. And we are experiencing it now in the church because together we have been brought near to God. The Bible reminds us of that hope in Jesus. And it teaches us to live out that reality of a people being brought near together in Jesus, a reality we will see in all its glory in heaven. And it teaches us to live out that reality by giving us steadfastness and encouragement. The Bible teaches us. And in this way, it builds us up so that we can serve each other.

The Bible is God himself speaking to the hearts, to our own hearts, to build us up and strengthen us. That's why verse five, Paul prays to the God of steadfastness and encouragement, the same words that he uses of the Bible's work. God himself speaking to our minds and our hearts. And so God gives us grace to serve as we read the Bible. That's why God's word is central in the life at St. John's through our small groups and in our large groups like this gathering as well. God gives us power to live for him as we hear that word together. So I want to close by saying that if someone asks you at lunch today, why do you go to church? What is the point? You can tell them what Paul has said. It is to be built up by God's word and by Jesus himself so that we might build other people up in Jesus so that people will know the goodness of God in their life. That is why we're here. It is to build up. And the great thing that it all accomplishes is the glory of God. And that's how we end. Look at verse Paul's prayer in verse six. He says, and this is a prayer for us. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another in accord with Christ Jesus that together you may with one voice glorify the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ. You know, I think everyone who goes to a church wants to go to church that is united, where there is harmony. And Paul is saying that as a church is completely concerned with building other people up for their good, as that happens, there is a deep harmony that God creates, a unity that brings great glory to God. And the incredible thing about this is that this affects people outside the church because people who are growing, people who are being built up and who are seeking to build others up are bright lights for the gospel. They are witnesses of the power of the resurrection of Jesus, and they will share that good news that is building them up.

Building is contagious. It doesn't stop within the walls of the church. It seeks to build others outside the church by bringing them to know Jesus and his gospel. It's as though they can't help themselves once people start building that construction work that God has called us to. And we will also be about seeking to build the church in other parts of the world. Mission and evangelism come as we seek to build each other up within the church. And so by the grace of God, let each of us know the point of being at church. Let us each please his neighbor for his good to build him up to the glory of God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. For that is what it means to be the church. Amen.

[23 : 09] Amen.