

Scripture Portraits of the Church - God's Temple

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] Begin our worship now. We're singing firstly today from Psalm 96A, Psalm 96A on page 126 of the Blue Psalm books. The tune is St. Columba, and that's number 126. St. Columba is the tune, page number is 12696A. We'll sing verses 1 to 10.

O sing a new song to the Lord. Sing praises to his name, and his salvation day by day. Let all the earth proclaim. His glory and his mighty deeds to every land declare. How great and awesome is the Lord. With him no gods compare. These verses 1 to 10 will stand to sing, if you're able to stand.

O sing a new song to the Lord. Sing praises to his name, and his salvation day by day.

Let all the earth proclaim. His glory and his mighty deeds to every land declare. How great and all awesome is the Lord. With him no gods compare. For at the cross and root and stone, the Lord made heaven's light. All power. All power and majesty, all majesty are his. He dwells in glorious light.mans.

He dwells in glorious light. All nations to the Lord have strife.

[2 : 44] The glory that is due. Glory and strength, a strike to God.

And praise His name and you. Adore His heart with joy and bring an offering with you.

Worship the Lord in holy fear.

All earth before Him are. Till every lamb the Lord is king.

His calf leases the air. And cannot move.

[4 : 07] The Lord will judge the people's name. It's true.

Let's join together now in prayer. Let's call upon the Lord. O gracious God, as we appear once again before you, as we gather together in worship, we pray that we may know that sense of your presence, that presence of God that is so precious to His people.

We come before you today, O Lord, to seek your blessing, as we seek to give you the worship that is due to your name. Lord, we pray that you would give to us the grace that we require, the grace that you know we need and how we need it and for what reason, the grace that you describe in your word as ever adapted to our need.

We thank you today for the privilege, Lord, of being here. We pray as we gather here. We pray especially now for the children. We pray that you would bless them, Lord, today as they receive further experience of what it means to belong to your church, what it means to worship you and to gather with others to worship you, and the teaching that comes from your word, from the gospel.

Bless them, we pray today. Grant your blessing to our young folk at this time as they have a time of holiday from school. Remember them, Lord, and keep them safe, we pray.

[5 : 37] Grant your blessing, we pray, to all our families, all our loved ones today as we commit them to you. We pray that you'd continue to guide them in the way of life. We ask, O Lord, that you would reveal yourself to them savingly, that they may become the children of God if they are not so already.

And again, we commend them, Lord, to you today and ask that you'd be pleased to draw near to them. Hear us, we pray now, and pardon our sin and cleanse us freely. For Jesus' sake, amen.

Amen. Well, a word to the children, this time before you go out to look to your tweenies. There are some others in as well that don't belong to tweenies.

But I have a plant at home, or I should say we have a plant at home. It's called a friendship plant. I understand there are quite a number of different kinds of friendship plants.

This one has nice blue flowers on it. And it's a rather strange plant because what happens is in this month, when the clocks change, later this month, this plant goes into a dark cupboard.

[6 : 48] And you just leave it there until the clocks change again next spring. Then you take it out, and it looks absolutely dead. It looks as if it'll never grow again.

You take it out into the light. You give it some water. And slowly it begins to come back to life. And eventually it grows and produces these flowers again.

And you do that every single year, as long as you have it. Put it in the dark when the clocks change in October. Bring it out again when the clocks change in the spring.

And that's really a picture for me and for you, I'm sure, as well, of resurrection, of coming back from the dead, which Jesus did. Remember, Jesus died on the cross.

He was buried in the garden. And on the third day after he died, he rose from the dead. He came back from the dead. And many people saw him after he had risen from the dead.

[7 : 48] And these plants remind us, just like you find in the springtime when the bulbs start coming through the earth again. Little snowdrops, first of all, and other bulbs. Looks like they've been dead.

They come back to life. Now, Jesus was dead, but he did come back to life. And the thing with a friendship plant is, not only does it show these features, and you can see it growing again after a time that it seems to have been dead.

But it's called a friendship plant because you're supposed to take cuttings from it, plant them, and then they grow into a friendship plant all on their own. And the reason you're called a friendship plant is, you then give that new plant to somebody else, a friend or a neighbor, and they actually look after it.

And we hope that they will actually take the cutting, pass that on to somebody else as a new plant. So the friendship plant keeps spreading. It comes to new homes, and it keeps producing new plants as the time goes on.

And Jesus has told us about himself, and Jesus gives us the life that he alone can give us, eternal life, not so that we can keep it to ourselves.

[9 : 06] The gospel, if you like, is a friendship plant. Once it's planted in our hearts and life there by Jesus' power begins to grow, we then pass it on to others.

We tell others about Jesus. And so the news about Jesus is something that we want to see going to different homes, different people, our friends, we pass it on to others.

So that they too will come to know Jesus, that they will come to love Jesus, and they'll pass on the news about Jesus to someone else. See if you can find a friendship plant.

Get your mums or dads or grannies or whoever to look for a friendship plant and see if you can grow it like this. See how amazing it is that it dies out for all of these months, and then six months later, it starts growing again, and you pass it on to friends.

That reminds you of the wonder of Jesus who came back from the dead, who gives us life so that we can then tell others about this wonderful news and pass it on to them, that they too will come to know Jesus for themselves.

[10 : 19] Now we're going to say the Lord's Prayer again together. Let's say the Lord's Prayer. Amen.

I'm going to sing again now to God's praise. Our second psalm is Psalm 71, and that's on page 90. A tune is Bunele. Psalm 71, verses 1 to 8.

And you, O Lord, I have taken refuge. Protect me ever from disgrace. Rescue and save me in your justice. Turn to me as I seek your face. Be my strong rock and my sure refuge, to which I always may resort.

Give the command to help and save me, because you are my rock and fort. These verses 1 to 8 in Psalm 71. Go on.

And I have taken refuge. I've taken refuge. Pray, oh, take me ever from disgrace. Rescue and save me in your justice.

[11 : 56] Turn to me as I seek your face. Be my strong rock and my sure refuge, to which I always may resort.

Give the command to help and save me, because you are my rock and fort.

From wicked hands, my God, go save me. From cruel hands of violence.

For sovereign Lord, you've been my refuge, and since my youth my confidence.

From birth I have relied upon you. You are the guide of all my ways.

[13 : 20] Out of my mother's womb you brought me, to you I ever will give praise.

To many I've had cause of wonder, but you are still my refuge strong.

My mouth is filled with adoration, praising your splendor all day long.

Now we'll turn to read God's Word. We have two readings this morning. First of all, from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, and chapter 2, verses 11 to 21.

And then we're going to read some verses from 1 Peter, chapter 2, and the first nine verses. So firstly from Ephesians, chapter 2, beginning at verse 11.

[14 : 40] Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands, remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 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. We turn to 1 Peter 2.

[16 : 22] We'll read the first 10 verses of the chapter. So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.

Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk that by it you may grow up to salvation. If indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good, as you come to him, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God, chosen and precious, you yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For it stands in Scripture, Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone, chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.

So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.

They stumble because they disobey the word as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

[17 : 54] Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

May God once again bless to us these readings of his word. Let's again engage in prayer. Amen. O gracious God, we thank you for your word.

We pray that you would bless your word to us today. We are familiar with much of its teaching, O Lord. Most of us have been familiar with it since the time of our youth.

But we pray again, Lord, as we need your spirit today to help us to understand and apply your word. We pray for that ministry of your spirit amongst us today as we gather. We thank you for the way that your spirit opens up our minds to understand those things of your word.

We pray that you would grant us today, O Lord, that we may know that our knowledge is increasing, that we grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[18 : 58] We ask, Lord, today for your blessing as we gather, as we gather in this place of worship. We pray that you would enable us, Lord, to know the privilege and to give thanks for the privilege of being your people in this world.

And as we have been reading in your word, O Lord, and as we will give a mind to later, and as we think, O Lord, of the teaching of your word, that your people form a spiritual temple, a spiritual dwelling place for God.

Help us, Lord, to have that sense of wonder and of praise and of delight that you have done this for us, that you do this with regard to your people, that you form them into that living temple in which you are pleased to dwell.

Lord, we ask your blessing today to be with us here as a congregation, as a part of that spiritual edifice that exists throughout the world, that you are building for yourself in all the different circumstances in which we find people's lives.

Yet, Lord, we know that you are taking your people out of darkness into light, that one by one you are saving your people and giving them to be as living stones placed in the walls of your spiritual temple.

[20 : 14] And we pray, O Lord, today that your spirit will be at work in all the places where your word is declared, wherever your word is read and proclaimed. Lord, we pray that you are blessed to the saving of their souls.

We pray that many will come to regard even this day as the day of their spiritual birth when they have been brought out of darkness into your marvelous light.

Bless us here, we pray, as a congregation. You have set us, O Lord, in these circumstances in which we find ourselves, in the location in which we find ourselves.

We know that you have done this for a purpose, so that we might show forth the light of the gospel and of your truth, that our lives might, Lord, reflect your goodness to us, your grace shining through your people.

We ask today that you bless us here, each one of us. We all represent such different needs and such a variety of needs. We represent, O Lord, such different gifts and different talents, different requirements, O Lord, different characters.

[21 : 23] We pray today, O Lord, that your word will bless us richly. We pray that we may know, Lord, as we leave this place that you have met with us. We have come under the influence of your truth.

We have come, Lord, to know the guidance of your spirit once again. And we pray that we may be thankful that we can anticipate such as we pray to you and ask, Lord, that you would even exceed what we ask and think.

Bless today those, Lord, who have specific needs that are brought to us from time to time. Remember, we pray, especially today, those who mourn some in tragic, unexpected circumstances.

We pray for them and for their families. And we ask that you draw near to them, Lord, with your healing touch, with your own grace to comfort them. We ask that they may be drawn to you, to draw their strength from you.

We pray that you would give them the grace to wait upon yourself, Lord, to realize that your interest in us as human beings extends to every aspect of life and that you have provided for us in the Lord Jesus Christ, one who understands all our need, who has indeed been touched with the filling of our infirmities, who has been tempted in all points like as we are, who knows in himself the reality of family life, of bereavement, of sorrow, of death.

[22 : 50] And we thank you today, O Lord, that he lives so as to be one who is able to bring that powerful help to his people. Remember, we pray those today who have had difficulties in the recent times to contend with.

Lord, we pray for those who have been in various accidents. We ask that you'd bless William, Don Durbin's brother, as he recovers from his accident at work.

We pray and give thanks, Lord, that he is showing an increase and coming back to health and strength. We pray for him. We pray for Don. We pray for the family.

We ask that you'd remember them at this time. We pray, Lord, too, for all others who have serious illness at this time who belong to us and are known to us in our community.

We pray that you'd lay your healing hand upon them if it please you. We pray for those who are anxious over them at this time. We pray that you'd be pleased, Lord, to draw near to them and give them of your comfort and guidance.

[23 : 56] We pray for our hospital, for our hospice, for our care homes, for all the various provisions made for us in them, Lord, in your goodness.

We ask that you would bless them to us and bless those who reside in them. We pray your blessing, too, Lord, for our society, our nation at this time, this time of uncertainty, time of continuing turmoil politically and socially.

We ask, O Lord, that you would give us the stability of your truth beneath all that we do. We lament the fact, O Lord, that your truth has so much been cast aside and that it has been taken so largely out of the public square and that attempts are still being made to take it out of the education of our children, the administration of justice and law and order.

Lord, be merciful to us, we pray, for our sins are so evident and we know that they are against you and against those things that you have revealed to us should be foundational for us as a people.

Our sin, Lord, is a reproach, but we pray in your mercy that you would turn to us. Elevate us in your righteousness, we pray. Raise up over us leaders in government, locally, nationally, who would fear the Lord, who would value and respect your laws, who would commend your gospel, who would, Lord, love your people and your cause.

[25 : 30] We pray that we may see this in our day, that we may know the turning of the tide of rebellion against God and come to see, O Lord, many turned into your ways.

So remember us, we pray, in our family lives. Remember us in the bonds that unite us together, whether in family or in the congregation or in the church. Grant your blessing to us, we pray.

Continue to do blessing too for our young adults, we pray for them. For those of them who have left home and begun study or work on the mainland, we pray for them too today and ask that you would be near to them.

We pray that you would assure them, Lord, of our prayers and of our remembrance of them. Grant to them that you would establish them further in your own ways and in following you as their Lord and Savior.

Continue with us now, Lord, we pray, and be to us throughout this day one who guides us into your truth and help us to know and to value this day as the day of the Lord, a day that you have set apart to be holy to yourself.

[26 : 35] May we, O Lord, keep it holy. May we be increasing in holiness through its provisions. Hear us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Before we turn to look at God's Word, let's sing once again. This time we're singing in Psalm 66, Psalm number 66, and that's on page 300.

The tune is Crimmond. Singing verses 13 to 20. We're thinking of today, as we'll see in Ephesians, of God's people, God building a spiritual house for Himself through the living stones, the people that He brings to know Himself and saves.

And we do sing these psalms with references such as bringing burnt offerings to the Lord's house. No longer do we bring, of course, animals for sacrifice. The spiritual meaning of these verses remains clear to us, I hope, that we're bringing our spiritual offerings to God.

We're offering to Him the sacrifices of our praise, and we're coming to lay our trust once again on Lord Jesus Christ who Himself has fulfilled the Old Testament sacrifices.

[27 : 54] So, verses 13 to 20, I'll bring burnt offerings to thy house. To thee my vows I'll pay, which my lips uttered, my mouth spake when trouble on me lay.

To the end of the psalm, to God's praise. I'll bring I'll bring burnt offerings to thy house, to thee my vows I'll pay, which my lips uttered, my mouth spake, when trouble upon me lay.

Burn sacrifices of that rams with incense with incense I will bring of goods and of goods I will present an offering.

all that fear, all that fear, Lord, come here, I'll tell what He did for my soul.

I with my mouth unto Him cried, my son death may extol.

[29 : 57] If in my heart I stand we guard, the Lord be well not here, but surely God me heard unto my play and toys gave give hear.

O let the Lord our gracious God forever blessed be who jarned not my prayer from the her nor get his grace from me.

Now if you would turn with me please to Ephesians chapter 2, the passage we read earlier, and looking at verses towards the end of that chapter, particularly verses 21 and 22.

We can read from verse 19 there, you are no longer strangers and aliens but are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God 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. Now we began looking at scripture portraits of the church.

[32 : 08] The church And you may recall that we have had four studies already as scripture portraits of the church. Three of these were from 1 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 15, chapter 3 verse 15 where you find the church described as the household of God, secondly as the church of the living God, and the pillar and buttress of truth.

And we looked at the various ways in which these descriptions of the church are applicable as we understand from that what a church is and what the church is about. We looked also at Psalm 87 where the church is regarded as a mothering church, a church which takes care of its children if you like, and the nurture that we receive from the way in which God has endowed the church with his word, with the gospel, with sacraments and so on.

Today we are looking at this picture of the church as a spiritual temple that God is building. Remember we saw in our previous studies that we don't regard the church as the building in which we meet.

The church is primarily the people who worship God, the people of God. And when we come to look at the church as a temple, it's obvious from what Paul describes and what Peter describes that it's a living temple.

It's made up of living stones, as Peter puts it, so that it's made up of people who have come to know the Lord, who follow the Lord, who love the Lord, who worship the Lord. It is these people that form the living stones from which God builds this spiritual temple.

[33 : 50] So that's the image, that's the picture, the portrait that we have today. So we're going to take in some of the description we find in 1 Peter 2 as well. A very similar emphasis there as you have to what you have in Ephesians here.

We'll just refer to that as we go through the study. But I want to look first of all at this reference to the cornerstone. Christ, Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

The cornerstone of buildings, especially formal buildings, buildings such as Paul and Peter were familiar with, the cornerstone is an exceedingly important part of the building and of the building process.

Because the cornerstone is far more than just a formal stone on which you might have a plaque written. Sometimes you do. The cornerstone was placed in such a way that the whole building then took its growth, its angles from that cornerstone.

So the cornerstone had to be placed and shaped exactly because the rest of the building related to that in such a way that if the cornerstone was wrong, then the angles of the building would be wrong.

[35 : 06] The building that was joined to the cornerstone would not itself be right. It wouldn't have the right dimensions or the angles to the walls or whatever. The cornerstone, therefore, was really foundational.

It's in a sense a foundation stone, but a stone that sets the angles and the characteristics of the building to which it relates. And that's why Jesus is called the cornerstone of God's spiritual temple.

Jesus is the one chosen by God, not God coming to choose an existing human being that He chose from the mass of humanity in this world.

The Bible clearly tells us that this is the eternal Son of God, the second person of the glorious Trinity that God is, that He came into this world.

In the words of John, this word, as he puts it, became flesh. God the Son took our humanity to be joined to His deity, and He remains God and man in His own person and will be so for all eternity.

[36 : 16] But that is the cornerstone being laid, if you like, the incarnation, the coming of the Son of God, His becoming human, all that He did then through our nature and all that He accomplished through His work in this world, especially culminating in His death and resurrection from the dead.

That is God setting His Son as the cornerstone of His own spiritual building, the temple. And every single stone, every single person that comes to know the Lord and to be brought alive by the Lord relates to that cornerstone.

That cornerstone sets, if you like, the dimensions and the angles of every individual Christian life. It is as we touch Him, as we are brought into contact with Him by God, that we actually come to have that life that God Himself alone is able to give us.

The spiritual life, eternal life. You remember that Jesus was examined, and in fact, in the Peter verses, you find a quotation from the Psalms I'm laying in Zion, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.

But the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. In other words, as you read the Gospels, as you find the examination of Jesus by the religious authorities of the day, as they examined Him and then rejected Him, what they were doing effectively was looking at Him as the cornerstone, the promised Messiah, and He didn't fit their specification.

[37 : 55] He didn't fit what they thought He should look like or the shape He ought to have, so He was rejected. But of course, it was God's choice of Him that really set Him as the cornerstone of the building.

Now, that's why in this verse that we're looking at in Ephesians, we find that verse 21, Christ Jesus is the cornerstone in whom the whole structure grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In Him you also are being built. Now, you see the emphasis there twice on in Him and in whom. This is what regulates the whole building project.

This is really what determines what the final edifice is going to look like. It is in Christ that we are built together. It's in Christ that we are reformed, refashioned, recreated individually, spiritually, in what Jesus Himself said to Nicodemus was being born again.

That's what effectively Paul is saying here in Ephesians. In whom you also are being joined together and you are growing into a holy structure.

[39 : 08] In Him you also are being built together. You see, the walls of God's spiritual temple are being built in Christ. When we are in Christ, when we are in Christ, we form part of the building project that God is setting about.

That's why it's so exceedingly important that you and I know of what it is to be born again. That we have life, spiritual life, because this building project takes what Peter calls living stones.

To whom coming, he said, Peter says, as a living stone, you also as living stones are being built up. You see what he's saying? You come into contact. God takes you into contact with Christ.

And as you come into contact believably with Jesus, your life is changed. Your life is transformed. You become a living stone then. And you're placed then in God's living temple to be part, together with all other living stones.

To be part of this wonderful building project that God is still carrying out and will be carrying out until the world ends.

[40 : 19] Well, there's the cornerstone. Let me just put the question to myself, first of all. Who is forming, or what is forming, the angles, if you like, to my life?

Who is forming the angles, the direction of your life? Is it Jesus? Are you firmly connected to Him?

Is your trust in Him? Is the life that is in Him running through the course of your life? Is what is important and not important determined by the Lordship of Jesus Himself in your life and my life?

That's part of what it means to be in living contact with this cornerstone, with this living stone. We take our life, we take the angles of our life, we take the directions of our life, we take everything to do with our own personal growth, if you like, along with those that we're growing with in the church of God.

And it's all from Christ Himself and knowing Christ. That's the most important thing for you and for me today, that you know Him. That you know Him as your own personal Redeemer.

[41 : 35] That you can say, yes, this is the cornerstone of my life. This is where my life is being directed from. Where my growth comes from.

The cornerstone who is Jesus Himself. Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone. But then it goes on to describe the spiritual building. And it includes the spiritual building work of God.

Notice he's saying, In whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord. Yes, each stone, each living person, each living Christian is a living stone.

And they're placed in the walls of God's living temple. But then they're in contact with all the other living stones. This is not an inert, lifeless procedure.

This is God taking people, bringing them to life, placing them as spiritual stones in the building up of His church. And it's a marvel, isn't it, when you look at the work of an expert stonemason.

[42 : 43] Just look at any of the walls that you find in our own locality. Most recently, these wonderful walls that you find out at the castle. And the way they've been put together so expertly.

And you can go there and you can admire the whole thing. But as you look at it closely, you can just stop and think, Well, all of these stones are different shapes. All of these stones are different sizes.

All of these stones have their own individual characteristics. And yet they're put together in such a way that they form this unified, this wonderful united wall.

This wonderful piece of construction. Well, here is what God is doing. He is taking people like you and I, who have very different characteristics, varying characteristics. Different personalities, different backgrounds, different gifts, different abilities.

And that's what he's putting together. See what he's saying here? In whom the whole structure being joined together. It's not just a loose conglomeration of stones that don't really fit together properly.

[43 : 51] God is saying, I know that you're very different to so-and-so and so-and-so. It's very different to somebody else. But if I've changed your life and I've placed you in the walls of my spiritual building, you fit in.

And that means you take all that you are able to give by way of acting as a Christian. Your Christian service, your Christian life may be very different in the way that other people serve the Lord.

But it all comes together and it all fits together. And it's God's program. It's God's project. And you admire the variety of it. And you admire the skill of God and His grace putting all of these differences together to form one wonderful united whole.

Building this marvelous spiritual structure. So the unity you see of the church is not just a matter of living in peace or harmony together.

That's part of it. It's a precious part of it. But the unity of the church really is how God is putting together people of varying gifts and distinctions and characteristics so that it's just the one building.

[45 : 01] The one whole united building spiritually that God is putting together. You know, in other words, a couple of things that follow on from that.

One is that you should never say of yourself, well, I just don't have the gifts that other people have. What can I actually do serving the Lord in the church? What can I give in terms of the overall building project to be in the hand of God as He's using me to build it?

Never say that of yourself. Never say that of yourself. Never say that you don't have the gifts. You may not have the gifts that somebody else has. But that person doesn't have the gifts you have.

Think of it, the way you look at natural building work. If you look at a stone wall, for example, that has an entrance to it and a large lintel made of stone on top of it.

If you look very closely, you'll actually find little slivers of stone placed beneath that lintel and rests on which that lintel rests.

[46 : 36] You'll see what God has gifted you to do. Every single person in this building today has something or other by which they can serve the Lord. By which they can fit into the overall growth of God's building.

And however it compares with others, that's not really ultimately what matters. God is putting all of that together, whatever we think of ourselves. And as we serve Him and as He endows us by His grace, so, as He puts it here, the whole structure being joined together, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

And the other thing on that point is that this is completely against the idea that you find sometimes, the idea that you find sometimes presented even in people's way of speaking, where they say, Well, I am a Christian, but I am a Christian at home, and I don't really need to belong to the church.

I don't need to belong to the church as it's seen in its gatherings on the Lord's Day or whenever. I can do without that. I can very easily, very well just be a Christian.

I worship God at home. I read my Bible. I actually pray to God. Well, that's good and well, and that is something that's commendable. But you cannot, in the teaching of Scripture, find any instance of someone whose life has been changed, someone who's born again, somebody who is a Christian, somebody who is a living stone that says, I don't want to be in contact with the other living stones.

[48 : 11] I don't need them. That's not biblical. God changes your life. God changes your life in such a way that fits you into the wall of His church.

And fitting you into the wall of His church is something that He gives you a mind to be part of if we come to know Him and come to know the wonder of His grace.

So, it's growing into a holy temple in the Lord as each living stone fits into the construction. Now, you can see what He's saying at the end here.

You're being built together, He says, into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. It's by the Spirit that this crucial work actually goes on.

God brings us to know Himself individually, personally, by His Spirit coming to working in our hearts, by His Spirit coming to bring us to life, by His Spirit coming to fit us into the walls of His church.

[49 : 15] It's growing together and it's growing into a dwelling place of God by the Spirit or in the Spirit of God. And that reminds us of something very important.

The growth of the church is not to be seen primarily in terms of statistics or lists or numbers. I'm not saying these are not important in their own right.

Of course, they're important because we'd love to see all of these pews that are presently empty actually coming to be filled by people like yourselves who come under the gospel to hear the Word of God, to worship God together with others.

Of course, that's important in its own right, but it's not of primary importance. The growth of the church, because this is a spiritual edifice, a spiritual building, the growth of the church is not in mere statistics or number on our lists.

I mean, we can actually look at our Communicants list, for example, and say that it's well above in terms of numbers, well above any of the other congregations in the presbytery.

[50 : 18] That doesn't mean we're growing spiritually as a church. That doesn't mean it's the most important aspect of our being the church of God here in Stornoway.

Growth, whatever you say about numerical growth, but this growth is spiritual growth. Am I today? Are we together? This is the thing that he's emphasizing.

It's not just individual growth, although I have to grow, you have to grow as a Christian individually in your relationship with Jesus, with God. What he's talking about here is growth together.

Are we today growing together? Are we growing in our congregational life? Are we growing, for example, in knowledge? Are we growing in zeal? In our zeal for the Lord?

Are we growing in love for the Lord? Are we growing together in all of these things? In many ways, I suppose, the answer to that really is yes, there's evidence of that, thankfully, in the congregation, and that's the case.

[51 : 18] But this is what has to be our primary emphasis in growth, spiritual growth. Growth in terms of our understanding. Growth in terms of our love for each other and for God.

Growth in terms of looking after each other. Growth in terms of how we view the world outside the church. And serving the Lord in our evangelistic activity. Growth in how we actually view our young people and our children and our families.

All of these dimensions and more of the growth is the kind of growth that the Bible means by the growth of his church. People who are growing together, are growing into a holy temple.

It is never static. We must not think of God's church as being as if it were just a static building such as this natural building. It's there and that's it, it doesn't change.

We have to grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we grow together. We help each other to grow. We have to give to each other the support that we need in order to grow together in a spiritual way. And that's a great privilege, being in a position to do that. But you see, the other thing is not just joined together, each stone being joined and fitted together, and therefore growing more and more into a spiritual building. He's describing the purpose of this building. In this context, it's to be a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Of course, the Old Testament had its temple, before that the tabernacle, right in the inner heart of the tabernacle. And then of the temple, you had the place called the Most Holy Place. And in the Most Holy Place was the mercy seat with the cloud symbolizing, evidencing God's presence above the mercy seat, overlooked by the cherubim, the carved cherubim. And there was God's presence indicated to be in the midst of His people, God living there,

[53 : 30] God having made a dwelling place for Himself there. Now, that was anticipatory. That was in many ways a prophetic thing or a symbolic thing that was going to be fulfilled much more in the days to come. And while that was real, and that cloud was real, and everything about it was real, and it was indeed the real presence of God in the New Testament age in Christ, God's presence is with His people in an even greater way. Because what He's doing is bringing His people together to be joined together, to grow together, to be His dwelling place. His people are His dwelling place. His people are the spiritual temple.

And today, if you belong to Christ, you are a stone in this living edifice. You belong to this growing temple. You belong to this in such a way that you form one of these stones that God is building together to be a dwelling place for Himself.

Isn't that a marvelous thing? You go back to the Old Testament, to the Garden of Eden. It was God dwelling with the human beings that He had created until they rebelled against Him.

And He did what He had threatened to do, brought death into their experience, and He drove them out of the garden. It wasn't a gentle push, a nudge. He drove them out, it's what the Bible says, because God is deeply, deeply offended by sin against Him. We can't appreciate just how deeply sin offends God. But you can see it in two things. You can see it certainly in the way He drove out human beings He had created out of Eden, and you can see it more so in the death of Jesus. You can never say that sin is not deeply offensive to God and a serious thing when you look at the cross. Why did Jesus die? Why did He have to die? Why did He have to die?

Not only because sin is serious and an offense to God, but because God was and is determined to save His people from their sins through the death of Christ. And so, the dwelling place of God. You see, this is such a marvelous thing. What a privilege it is to regard yourself as a Christian, as being a living stone placed in the walls of God's temple, that you should be, that I should be chosen by God, taken by God, changed by God, placed by God, that such a person as I, the sinner, should actually be taken and transformed by the grace of God and placed in the walls of God's spiritual temple so that along with others, I form, I'm part of what forms a dwelling place for God.

[56 : 34] God is here today. God is in this building today. We can say that with all assurance.

Not because of the nature of this building itself, but because of the nature of the spiritual building formed by all of those people here today who are His people. He dwells in them. I can't explain to you exactly if you like the spiritual mechanics of that. I know it by His Spirit. God comes to live in His people, but He's forming the spiritual temple out of His people to be His dwelling place, to be His home. It's not a holiday home. It's not something that He choose to live in now and again.

It's a permanent residence for God. And it comes to its completion when you find the terms of Revelation 21 fulfilled at the end of the world. Remember what that says about how at the end of all things I saw a new heaven and a new earth? And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man, and He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God, and so on. You look back to the Garden of Eden, and all you see is the ruins of a temple, as one of the theologians long ago put it.

It has on the entrance point, as it were written, Here God once lived. Here God once lived. Then you see, by God's grace, He has taken these dead stones, and Ephesians itself tells us that you were dead in trespasses and sins, the beginning of this chapter, you who were dead.

And He goes on to say, You has He quickened. You who were dead, He has brought to life, and He's made you living stones. And that temple that God is building, it's a building project that will be completed at the return of Christ, when all the living stones have been fitted together, and when all of God's people will then in perfection come to be God's dwelling place forevermore. But there's one other thing I want to mention, and it's an important emphasis in the passage. We're really passing over it very quickly, but it's an important one. It grows, it says, into a holy temple in the Lord. Why is it holy? What is it about this temple that makes it holy? Well, the fact that its occupant is the holy God means that the temple must be holy. That means you and I as God's people are taken by God, set apart by God, and in our own consciousness as born again, we say, I must be holy because God is holy. I form part of this living temple that God is putting together, and as I am a stone, a living stone in that temple, because He is holy, I have to be holy. I have to correspond to the holiness of the occupant, of the builder, of the architect. You remember how Peter put this again in his first chapter of his first epistle, in verse 13, therefore, preparing your minds for action and being sober-minded as obedient children. Don't be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as He who called you is holy, so also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, you shall be holy, for I am holy.

[60 : 48] And if you go to Paul's writings as well, you'll find in 1 Corinthians 3, verses 16 and 17, very similar words to what we're studying this morning. Chapter 3 of 1 Corinthians, verses 16 and 17, do you not know that you, you plural, that means you together, do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him, for God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. What a sad thing it is to see the church of God in this world, coming to willingly depart from the standard that God himself has set for our relationships with each other, for our individual lives morally and spiritually.

Here is a reminder to us today that because the occupant is holy, because the cornerstone is holy, we have to live holy lives. This is to do with moral, spiritual standards.

And again, that's a great privilege to live a holy life, to live as part of God's holy temple. For one thing, what we want to have the world say is that we actually look very like the architect.

Sometimes, I don't know, I'm not by any means knowledgeable in terms of architecture architects, but I know that there are certain buildings in the world because of how they're built, because of their appearance, because of what they're like themselves. You go to a place like Barcelona, for example, you'll find architecture there that's associated with a particular architect, and people will immediately say, oh, that's the work of so-and-so. Well, that's how we want to be known in this world, as the work of God, as the temple of God, as the people of God, as those designed by God, saved by God, saved by God, saved for God, the dwelling place of God, the holy temple of God.

Are you today, then, in Christ? Do you belong to this living temple of God? Are you a living stone in your relationship with Jesus? What does that mean for you today? How do you view your progress in life?

[63 : 24] How do you view being for all eternity? A living stone in this temple, or just outside it, lost, left, condemned? Let's pray.

Lord our God, we thank you for your grace. You transform your people by your grace. You fit them together, as we have been seeing in your word. Blessed to us, we pray, this passage of your word. Help us in our own relationship with you and with one another to be known and to know ourselves as that holy temple that you are in process of building. Grant that we may advance in holiness, that we may love your likeness wherever we find it, and especially in ourselves. Here, as we pray, for your glory's sake. Amen.

Now let's sing in conclusion. Again, it's from the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 27. Psalm 27, verses 4 to 6. You'll find that on page 236, singing to the tune, Jackson.

One thing I of the Lord desired and will seek to obtain, that all days of my life I may within God's house remain, that I in the beauty of the Lord behold, may and admire, and that I in his holy place may reverently inquire. That's verses 4 to 6 of Psalm 27.

One thing I of the Lord desired and will seek to obtain, that all days of my life I may within God's heart see.

[65 : 27] that I in the beauty of the Lord behold, may and admire, and that I in this holy place may reverently inquire.

For he in his pavilion shall be hide, and on our Lord be raised, For he in his pavilion shall be hide, and on our Lord be raised. And on our Lord be raised, and on our Lord be raised, and on our Lord be raised. And on our Lord be raised, and on our Lord be raised, and on our Lord be raised.

who God will not nesse mo■e me wounds Did see that all his pavilion shall be found, and the Lord must transfer bend by, and on our Lord be raised. That I know if God will pass because of my life He will not I coursing live, and on our God be opened And on an old be raised And now even at this pleasant time My head shall lifted thee Above all those that are my clothes How old and the past be Therefore unto this tabernacle I'll sacrifices bring

Of joyfulness I'll sing Yea, I do for the world Praise His name I'll go to the main door after the benediction Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father And the communion of the Holy Spirit Be with you now and evermore Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen