

Lake Cities Community Church  
Ecclesiology 101  
May 25, 2008  
Pastor Craig Schill

### **“Building the Church”**

1 Cor 3:10-17, Ephesians 2:20-21, 1 Peter 2:4-10

Hans Christian Anderson said, “Where words fail, music speaks.” Some things are so beautiful that words come short in describing them. When it comes to describing the church of Jesus Christ we can say, “Where words fail, metaphors speak”. In ecclesiology –most of the teaching we have about the church is wrapped up in the beauty of metaphor. Today we look at the church as a building – next week as a bride, then as a body, and on Father’s Day 6/15, Ian will bring us the message on the church as a family.

I had the privilege of growing up with a father who is an architect, so my brother sister and I grew up with an appreciation for buildings. Our house always had stacks of blueprints – how fascinating to see layer upon layer of plans! And sometimes dad would bring home models – buildings in miniature – you can see how the final design will look. Dad instilled in us to be appreciative of structure and space – to see how and why a building is the way it is. Well, this morning - put on your hard hat – we are heading to a construction site called the church!

### **Gathering the Building Materials**

Before we go to the construction site – we need to begin by gathering our building supplies. What do we need to put into our spiritual cart at the heavenly Home Depot?

First is the foundation. Let’s put some bags of concrete into the cart. The foundation is that upon which the building sits. It provides the location and stability for the project. If the foundation is poor, the structure will not last, if the foundation is firm, the building will survive. For the church

the question is not “what” is the foundation, but “who”? Turn to 1 Cor 3:11. Paul says, “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” According to Paul, the foundation of the church is Jesus Christ.

Our second building supply we must put in our cart is the cornerstone. The cornerstone rests upon the foundation and depending on its quality – so will go the quality of the building. So we need to look for a perfect cornerstone – or as perfect as we can find, just the right size; square and solid - so that when other stones are set against it and on it - the structure will be true. Who is the cornerstone? Turn to Ephesians 2:20b “Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*.” So Jesus is both the foundation and he is the corner stone.

Our third item for the cart is a bulk purchase. We need lots of stone to now be ready to be joined to the cornerstone so the structure might go up. In the metaphor of the church as a building - who are the building stones? Turn to 1 Peter 2:5, “You also as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood.” The living stone are you and I. The Greek word for stone is not the general word for rock (*petra*) but *lithos* – a stone that is cut and shaped and prepared for construction. Jesus is the foundation, the cornerstone, and also the stonemason – who has prepared each stone, one by one for its particular place in the structure of the church.

### **Preparing for Construction**

Well, our cart is full – we have our building materials – a foundation, a cornerstone and lots of rocks. I remember many years ago in our first home we purchased a 10x16 wood shed to be put up in the backyard. Now you can pay extra to have the Home Depot or Lowes construct your shed, but where is the manhood in that? No, the truck came with all the building supplies needed for the project – the walls, the shingles, the door, the nails, etc. and dumped them all, unceremoniously in our front yard. A huge pile!! And Tammy thought, “Who is going to put this together?!”

Well, we have a bunch of building supplies to build up the church – Who is going to put this together?! Can we do it ourselves? Do we need to hire an outside contractor? No - I have good news - we already have a master builder – Jesus Christ. Hebrews 3:4 reads, “For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.” Jesus said again in Matthew 16:18 “I will build my church!”

Great! What a relief! Put Jesus in charge – we will rest over here in under the shade tree – oh good lemonade. With our 10x16 shed, my dad Bob and Tammy’s dad Steve came to our home for a shed raising party. My Dad is an architect; Tammy’s dad is super-handy. But would it be right for me to say, “Go at it men – I’m going out to dinner and will be back later?” Not at all! The Bible teaches us that Jesus does not build the church alone – but he calls you and I to join him. We are not just living stones in this metaphor – but co-workers in the building project. Turn back to 1 Corinthians. Paul is talking about this very thing in agricultural terms – One plants the seed, one waters, but God makes it grow – then he transitions to the building metaphor: For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.” (1 Cor 3:8-9).

So grab a trowel and shovel. It is time to get to work. We co-labor with God! Turn back to Ephesians 2 – verses 20-21 for three rules to follow about the construction process: First –the building is being built on the foundation of Jesus Christ “Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” With our shed project – we had a concrete pad that was the foundation for the shed. Where do we build? Right there – on the foundation. The church is built on Christ. Many churches today have foundation problems - because they have tried to build their church on something other than Christ.

Second the building of the church is constructed carefully and in an orderly manner. “Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, in whom the whole building, being fitted together.” The root

of the Greek word translated “fitted together” is *harmos* from which we get harmony. The joints match up – the walls are aligned. The steps are followed. Paul said in our Corinthians passage 1Cor. 3:10 “each man must be careful how he builds on it.” The church is built person by person – living stone by living stone – Christ building his church and you and I along side as co-laborers, toiling, sweating and working so hard for the beauty of the building of His church.

One more construction rule - Third, the building must keeps growing. Don’t expect a break anytime soon. Our shed was done in a day and a half – and we were able to say “we are done and rest!” But the church “is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; The church building has been under construction for 2,000 years and it will continue to grow until Christ returns. Get ready for the long haul. Your employment as a coworker in the church will last a lifetime.

### **Applying for a Building Use Permit**

We have made good progress – we have our materials to build the church – and we have our instructions. Now is the time to explore the question, “What type of building is going up here?” If we had to apply for a building use permit – what we would put on the form. What type of building is going up here? We just saw the answer didn’t we? At the end of Ephesians 2:21 - that is a good question and the answer is that what is going up is a temple. Ephesians 2:20-21, “growing into a holy temple in the Lord.” Back to 1 Cor 3:16, “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?” We are not building an entertainment venue. We are not building a hospital. We are not building a military base. We are building a temple. A temple – Wow – immediately we are linked to the Old Testament and the tabernacle.

Let’s give ourselves a little background on the significant of the temple – because now, the church is God’s temple. Look at the summary I provided on the back of your handout.

“God dwelt in the temple of Israel, as in the earlier tabernacle, for the purpose of having communion with His people. Speaking of the tabernacle, God told Moses, “I will meet you, to speak to you there. I will meet there with the sons of Israel, and it shall be consecrated by My glory” (Exodus 29: 42a-43). For this reason the tabernacle was called the tent of meeting, the place where God met His people. Above all the temple was the dwelling place of the glory of God. From its position between the cherubim above the Ark of the Covenant, the Shekinah glory went out in acts of power. God now dwells in His New Testament temple, the church. Rather than a temple made with hands, He has created a temple in the hearts of men through faith in Christ. The body of each member of the church, as well as the church collectively, is a temple. The glory of God indwells this New Testament temple.” – Robert Saucy, *The Church in God's Program*, 1972, p.38.

Think about how amazing it must have been in the ancient world to be able to say – See that temple – God is in there. God has come to be with His people – He is in a little room. Yes God! And now – where is God – where does He dwell – in the church!! If you ever wondered why the church is so central to God's plan for the world – it is because God dwells in His church – Here is God's presence. Here is God's glory. Ephesians 2:22 “In whom you are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”

### **Staffing the Temple with Priests**

There is so much more we could say about that but we have one more part of this rich metaphor – Now that we know that what is being built is a temple – we must recognize that the temple needs to be staffed and who serves in a temple? Priests! In our metaphor of the church as a building – you are not only the living stones, you are not only the co-workers constructing the temple, but you are also the priests in the temple. Turn to our 1<sup>st</sup> Peter passage, chapter 2. 1Pet. 2:5a

“You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood... You are a royal priesthood.”

As a priest, like those in the OT you have been chosen by God, made holy by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:5). You, as a priest have been anointed with the fragrance of Christ (1 John 2:20, 27) and you are wearing the priestly garments – you have been clothed with Christ Himself (Gal 3:27, Rom 13:14, Rev 19:13). And therefore – we can draw close to God – We can approach His throne.

But what do we bring to God? We bring no sacrifice – bull or sheep – because Christ was the perfect sacrifice and the cost for our sin is covered. But there are five other sacrifices that we as priest in the temple of the NT church must bring. Here is our job description:

First, we bring ourselves – our own life – this is our main sacrifice – Rom. 12:1 “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.” We give ourselves to Christ.

Second, we bring a sacrifice of praise to the Lord. Heb. 13:15 “Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.” We remind ourselves and one another that it is Christ who is the cornerstone and the foundation and the master builder – we praise HIM and not ourselves.

Third, we bring the sacrifice of service to God. Heb. 13:16 “And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” When the church stops doing good in the world – the priests are sitting down on the job and God is not pleased.

Fourth, we offer the sacrifice of salvation – each sharing the good news. Paul said of his calling... Rom. 15:16 “...ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that *my* offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” (also 1 Peter 2:9).

Fifth, we offer the sacrifice of prayer. Jesus said, Mark 11:17 “And He *began* to teach and say to them, “Is it not written, ‘MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF **PRAYER** FOR ALL THE NATIONS?’” Through all its work, the church intercedes and prays for those in need, for the gospel to go forth, for the lost to find Christ.

The church is a working temple – open for business. When our family toured the National Cathedral in Washington D.C. two years ago – most all we could see were tourists and tour guides, a bookstore and photo opportunities. The guide knew this and threw in at the beginning – “this is a working church.” As long as there are faithful priests in the temple – the work of the church will be done.

### **Lessons Learned:**

1) **Watch out for Foundation Problems.** When do foundation problems happen? When a church is built on a foundation other than Jesus Christ. We learn from this metaphor the church is Christocentric. Christ is the foundation, the cornerstone the mason, the high-priest – get the picture it is about HIM! A church should not be built on a pastor’s personality. A church should not be built on a technique. A young pastor went into a church in East Texas and went to the board and said – my vision for this church is to become a purpose-driven church! That is what we need to do! It split the church right in half. It was the wrong foundation. Not that there are not some good principles in the purpose –driven model – or the Willow model – or the Harvest model –or the seeker model – of the emerging model – or the ancient-future model – but be very careful that those things don’t become the foundation of the church! Those are not cornerstone

material – only the person and work and teaching of the historical Jesus Christ who can and lived, died, rose again and ascended into heaven to return – that is the foundation of the church!

- 2) **Second – Every person has a place in the church.** Every living stone is crafted to fit into the structure. God has a plan and a purpose for you in His church – in the local church. Have you found your place? Maybe you are stilling trying to discover it? Talk to me, or one of our elders – God created you to fit here and so we must carefully build lives one after another into the church.
- 3) **You are a priest not a parishioner.** In this metaphor - you are on staff – you are doing the work of ministry – bringing the sacrifices. This may be the most important lesson from this picture of the church – because some of us might think “I can’t wait until we grow a little bigger so that the staff can do the work.” No – you are the priest and the co-workers with Christ – and no matter how big we grow – you need to see yourself as the one who owns the ministry. You are a priest and not a parishioner. You are on staff!
- 4) **Your Sacrifice is... well a sacrifice.** King David said that he would not bring the Lord something that cost him nothing. So with us – there is a reason why the Bible calls it a sacrifice. We sacrifice for our families, for our careers, even for our hobbies we will sacrifice so much, but what about the church?
- 5) **Be a builder and not a wrecker.** In this metaphor it should not have to be said, but our job is to build up the church – construction *not* destruction! Yet there are so many who go from church to church discouraging the ministry, speaking critically, stirring up dissention. Don’t let that be your legacy. Steer a wide birth around needless controversy. When you have a conflict – use biblical peacemaking principles to resolve it. Do everything you can to build up the Church – not to tear it down.

## **Conclusion**

I would like to end with this poem:

### **A Builder Or a Wrecker?**

As I watched them tear an old church down  
A gang of men in a busy town  
With a ho-heave-ho, and a lusty yell  
They swung a beam and the sidewall fell

I asked the foreman, "Are these men skilled,  
Are they the men you'd hire if you wanted to build?"  
He gave a laugh and said, "No, indeed,  
To build takes skill – you can destroy with ease."

"I can easily wreck in a day or two,  
What builders have taken years to do."

And I thought to myself, as I went my way  
Which of these roles have I tried to play?

Am I a builder who works with care,  
Building God's church by rule and square?  
Am I shaping people to a well-made plan  
Patiently doing the best I can?

Or am I a wrecker who walks to town  
Content with the labor of tearing down?  
"O Lord let my life and my labors be  
That which will build your church for eternity!"

