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BIBLE TEACHING SERIES
I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH – *Jesus*

CHAPTER ONE
THE CHURCH THAT JESUS BUILDS

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Introduction – The church as a building

Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain.
Psalm 127:1

In many instances throughout the Bible reference is made to the church as a building, sometimes as house. A house is a dwelling place and can refer to a person's heart – who or what lives there? Jesus spoke of wise versus foolish choices when it comes to how we build our lives – building upon the Rock who is Jesus, or on sand – the temporal things of the world (Matthew 7:24-27). In Galatians 6:10 the church is referred to as a "household of faith" or "family of believers"

In Matthew 16:16-18 we read:

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."
Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. Matthew 16:16-18

Notice that Jesus didn't say that He would grow His church. He said He would "build" it.

God is the supreme architect, Jesus is the master builder. The Holy Spirit is the agent who gathers the material needed for the project. We are the material he gathers and uses to construct the building. Like other buildings, the church has a foundation, walls, a roof and a point of entry – a door. We will consider each component in this study.

Upon hearing Peter's words, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God", Jesus made a most important decree. He said "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it". True to His word Jesus has been building His church and continues to do so to this very day.

Peter's confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" is the confession upon which God acts and every time that confession is made in repentance, humility and faith, a person is added to the church.

Previous Construction Projects

The church is not God's first construction project. He designed and built the universe itself. He designed and built the earth on which we live.

Every builder begins with a foundation. The Psalmist said:

In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. ." Psalm 102:25

After God created the heavens and earth he looked at all he had done and said it was "good". (Genesis 2:31). But something terrible happened. A terrorist destroyed the earth. That terrorist was sin. The whole human race has been held hostage and has lived under its cruel tyranny ever since its encroachment began.

Mankind, the crown of God's creative works, destroyed the beautiful building that God had lovingly gave him for it was through man that sin entered the world. The earthly father of the human race, Adam, changed everything. He altered the place of man's habitation and destined the whole family to a perilous and eternal end. In His mercy God expelled man from the Garden of Eden, a place of absolute beauty and blessing. In mercy? Yes, in mercy! If He hadn't, man may have eaten of the tree of life thereby subjecting the race to life without remedy for sin. Humankind would live forever in a state of separation from God. Our first parents found themselves struggling for survival in a place east of Eden called the "land of Nod". The land of Nod is the place of "curse" and it is where the human race has lived since Eden. It is a cold and barren land in which none survive. It is a land void of God's blessing.

Amazingly and wonderfully, the master architect in his foreknowledge knew well in advance of the coming of mankind's self-inflicted mortal wound and immediately God began working on plan B.

The Bible, in Revelation 13:8 says:

"All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

When God laid the foundation of the world, he also laid another foundation. He laid the foundation of the church and that foundation is Jesus, the Lamb. As a lamb He died for the sins of the world. Christ's sacrificial death on the cross is the price God paid in order that there could be a church. When Jesus finishes building his church, plan B will be more glorious than plan A.

The Church's One Foundation

So this is what the Sovereign LORD says:

"See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation;
the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic".

Isaiah 28:16

Jesus Christ is the foundation upon which the church is built and he is also its cornerstone. A cornerstone marks the identity of a building. Wise men and women build their lives on this foundation and find their identity in Christ. Jesus Christ is the only sure foundation. In strength He is invincible, in duration He is eternal.

Jesus is the only immutable foundation. No attack against him will prevail or prosper. Storms, heat, cold, the passing of time do not erode this foundation. He is indeed a "sure" foundation.

Those who build on other foundations have no security and are vulnerable to a host of calamities, the greatest being death and hell. Anxiety and uncertainty encompass them causing them to act with haste in vain attempts to find peace and meaning. The Christian's haste and panic has ended. The believer has found the peaceful harbour, has come in from the storm - is eternally secure in Christ.

In the New Testament Paul quoted this verse and added to it. He said:

As it is written:

"See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame. " Romans 9:33

Our shame is removed when we come to Christ. Shame is what marked our identity when we lived in sin. Our identity is changed through Christ.

Make no mistake, Jesus is the only sure foundation, there is no other. The Bible says:

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:11

Sadly, many in our world build their lives on other foundations and in doing so they build on sand. Saddest of all is the person who has heard about Christ, who knows the gospel and has even at one time been a follower of Christ. For some reason the person rejects Christ. Israel as a nation did this.

The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.
Psalm 118:22

This verse is quoted in the New Testament five times. (Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:10, Luke 20:17, Acts 4:11, I Peter 2:4).

The foundation of the church doesn't always look appealing. Its location doesn't appear to be the best. The devil declares that no such foundation is needed. Human reason leads to other foundations that are more appealing to the senses. Nevertheless, everyday, thousands of people across our world choose to build their lives on Christ.

The Walls

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house^[a] to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" 1 Peter 2:4-5

“Living stones” sounds like a contradiction in terms. Nothing is more inanimate than a stone. Stones are not a staple of life. The idea that God infused life where it did not exist before shows us something of the wonder of the gospel. God takes us in our most lifeless form, when we were dead in trespasses and sins, and gives us new life in Him. In His hands we become malleable as our Lord shapes us and conforms us to be a part of his church.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” Ephesians 2: 19-22

No one is a stone unto himself. Every stone depends on other stones to support it in the wall. We are fitted together and built up into a beautiful mosaic, a wonderful structure called the church.

The apostles and prophets are secondary elements in the foundation. Their words were God inspired and form the body of literature we call the New Testament of the Bible. The Bible, God’s Word, is the blueprint that directs the construction of the church. It’s a blueprint we must follow.

The church has a purpose. It is the “dwelling place of God in the Spirit”. Holy Spirit lives in the church. He indwells every lively stone. Through him the church fulfills the purposes of God on the earth.

The foundation upon which we are built is truly amazing for it is large enough to accommodate every stone (every person) in the world from the beginning until the end of time.

You have probably observed the church to be something other than a perfectly fitted structure where each member supports the other. Often churches resemble something completely different. Instead of harmony there is strife, instead of honour there is dishonor, instead of order there is disorder. You may have wondered, “What’s wrong with the church? Where did it lose its uniqueness and become like any other building?”

The tower of Pisa in Pisa, Italy, was built as a bell tower for the Cathedral that is located there. Construction began in 1173 and 5 years later, at the time the builders reached the 3rd story, they noticed the building had a lean. It is now known as “The Leaning Tower of Pisa” and every year hundreds of thousands of tourists visit Pisa to see this wonder.

It could be said that the tower lost its vertical perspective when it began to move horizontally. Churches do this too. The flaws we often see in the church are due to the earthly leanings of its members in both their notions and behaviors. Just like the leaning tower of Pisa it sometimes takes awhile before you notice the lean. The Tower of Pisa was closed to tourists in 1990 due to the advancement of its lean bringing it perilously close to toppling. Corrective measures made the tower safe once again and it reopened in 2000.

Consider the words that follow the verse in Isaiah (chapter 28:16) that we quoted earlier. The next verse reads:

...so I will make justice the measuring line, And righteousness the plummet
Isaiah 28:17

You can be sure of this. The foundation of the church is true and God's building methods are not haphazard. He builds with measuring line and plummet. So, when the church gets out of shape guess whose fault it is? It's our fault of course! What is God's remedy? It is his Word. The Bible is the church's measuring line and plummet as well as its blueprint. We, the church, need to ensure we function true to God's word..

The Furniture

No house looks complete without furniture, appliances and decorations. The church is made functional and is beautified by the gifts of God's Spirit and the many graces and blessings that abound toward the church, all made possible through Jesus, who loved the church and gave himself for the church.

The Roof

The church is a marvelous building indeed. Its covering, that which protects it from outside elements that could harm it, is the covering protection of God himself.

The Door

No longer will violence be heard in your land,
nor ruin or destruction within your borders,
but you will call your walls Salvation
and your gates Praise. Isaiah 60:18

Isaiah's prophecies often contained Messianic promises that were not understood at the time he uttered them. It was not possible to build the walls of Salvation about which he spoke of until the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Salvation turns dead stones into living stones, which in turn form the walls of the church.

But Isaiah's words also hold another wonderful meaning. The gates of the church are as Isaiah said, "gates of praise" The world is full of contempt and criticism. Everyday people walk through a barrage of signals that speak of shame and inferiority. It is no wonder that the world "makes haste" in a desperate attempt to find significance and meaning to life. The church is different. Gone are the words of shame and contempt and in their place are words of life, peace, joy, hope and every good grace of God. These are "praise words" which acknowledges both the gift and the Giver. The gifts are ours to enjoy. The Giver is none other than God himself and to Him the church ascribes all honour and praise for the great thing He is doingHe is building his church!

In ancient Israel elders and judges sat by the gates of the city, judged the affairs of the people and passed on their wisdom.

Hell too has its gates. These are the counsels of the devil himself. His counsel is about condemnation, despair and hopelessness. It is the place of temptation, lust and sin abounds. Both the counsels and their results are powerfully destructive.

But Jesus said,

I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.
Matthew 16:18

The counsels of hell are less in potency than the counsels and power of Jesus Christ. No condemning word against you is greater than the power of the word of the cross and God's grace. The church should never lose its confidence in this fact and do all it can to proclaim Jesus to the world.

In Isaiah the walls of Salvation are depicted as having more than one gate of Praise – there were many gates of Praise. Think of the tens of thousands of churches all across our world, each proclaiming the message of salvation, each inviting men and women, teens, and children to come and join. The counsel at the gates of Praise is simply this: Jesus Saves! He is building his church! Come and be a part! No counsel on earth or from hell is greater than this!

John 10:7-9

Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.

Jesus is the gate, the door, and He invites you to enter!
