

God's House

Blueprint: God's Design for the Church

Ephesians 2:19-22

If you have your bibles, go ahead and open to Ephesians chapter 2. In just a few moments, we're going to stand and read verses 19-22. Many of you know my dad. He comes to the 7:50 service. You know my dad as a farmer. You've heard me talk about our relationship together and how I love to farm with my dad. What some of you may not know is my dad is also a carpenter. There are two kind of carpenters. There is the rough carpenter that roughs in houses or buildings, and then there is the carpenter that follows those carpenters called the finish carpenters. My dad is a finish carpenter. As a matter of fact, my dad builds furniture. If I can brag on my dad just for a moment, he is really, really skilled at building furniture. Our shop is not used to repair farm equipment it is used by dad to build furniture. I can't tell you how many times we look in the shop and we'll ask Dad this question; what are you building now? Dad is always building something. A few years back, my dad built a bedroom suit for my mom. The intention was for my mom and dad upon their deaths, for that bedroom suit to go to Celisa and me. Many of you know my mom passed away three years ago today, and shortly after my mom's death, Dad said to me and Celisa, "I don't want you to have to wait until after I die to enjoy that bedroom suit. I want to give it to you now." So we now have that bedroom suit in our bedroom. I can't tell you what a joy it brings to us. Let me tell you about that bedroom suit. It is made out of Cherrywood. The tree that bedroom suit is made from was grown on our farm. My dad cut that tree down, then took it to the sawmill right across Lake Barkley, and that man sawed up the cherry tree that my dad took to him. They talked about it and let that wood age, they let that wood dry naturally. Then many years later, Dad took those boards out of the pile where he had stacked them. There in the shop, Dad's got what is called a planer. All of

those boards from the sawmill were sawed into 1"x boards, they call them, but they were rough. There was no way they would look like nice furniture. Dad took those rough boards and ran them through the planer, because Dad wanted to take what was rough and get it precise. That planer caused the thickness of every one of those boards to be planed to the exact thickness. But when those boards come off a sawmill sawblade, they have a tendency not to be perfectly straight. Dad had the help of his Uncle Guy, who was just like a brother to him, and they would put those boards on the edger and they would edge off all of those boards. After they had all of those boards edged, Dad took those boards, and with glue and various tools, nails, and a few screws, and he made a marvelous bedroom suit that my wife and I enjoy.

Because of fall break, some of you have missed the last few weeks. The passage that we're going to speak about this morning is based on what has been said earlier in Ephesians chapter 2. It's been obvious; God's been doing something. But God is not just doing something; God is building something. Many of us throughout our lifetime have heard analogy after analogy, metaphor after metaphor, about how great a farmer God is. Some of us forget is our God is not only a great farmer; He is a master carpenter. What I want us to ask this morning as we stand to look at this passage is what is God building? We're going to get to look into His carpenter shop this morning and see that He's building you and me into the temple of God. Would you stand with me as we look at Ephesians chapter 2, and we're going to read verses 19-22? If, because of fall break, you missed the last two weeks, or just missed the last two weeks, please go online and listen to the two previous sermons on Ephesians 2 in their entirety, because it gives us the foundation for this sermon.

Scripture

"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."

"So then..." You've got to stop, because Paul is using two very important words here to tell us that what he's getting ready to say is based on what he's just been saying. "So then..." Quickly, can I remind you of what we've already learned in Ephesians chapter 2? Before I remind you of that, can I remind you why Paul wrote Ephesians chapter 2 under the leadership of God's Holy Spirit? It is because he wanted the eye of the church's heart to be opened to what is the hope of our calling, what is the riches of God's inheritance in us as the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe. So then, here is what he tells us. He tells us about God's redemption of us in chapter 2:1-10, and then he tells us about God's reconciliation of us in verses 11-18, so when we come to verses 19-22, we'll understand God's residence in us. Did everyone get that? So that we understand God's residence in us, we must first understand God's redemption of us and His reconciliation of us. God doesn't just take us from rough; He takes us from rough to precise because He's a master carpenter, and He's building a temple. He's building Himself a house, and it's not going to be a vacation home, it's not going to be a winter home, it's not going to be a summer home; it's going to be His permanent residence. See, just as my dad chooses the type of wood he's going to build with, then has to get it out of the woods as a tree, but then he has to get it into board form, so did God. If we could use a wood analogy because most of us build with wood when we build our houses, God chose to build His church and go into the forest of sin and cut down a tree (you, me) that was a sinner, and transform us into a saint of God. It blows...my...mind. If you missed that sermon, please hear this. Hardin Baptist Church does believe that when you were saved, you were saved from the penalty of sin and you will never go to Hell. You will go to Heaven when you die. But hear me; when you quote Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourself, it is the gift of God," Paul is not talking about us being saved from Hell. He's saying we've been saved from a lifestyle of sinning. Did you catch that? You've been

saved from being a sinner. This is why one of the core values of Hardin is we are not sinners who are saved by grace anymore. We were sinners that were saved by grace, but the moment we were saved by grace, God transformed us into saints of His. He got us out of sin, but He didn't just get you out of sin, He didn't just redeem you, He didn't leave you rough, so to speak. No, He reconciled us to Him. Did you catch that? God wants to get us all to the same thickness. Our width and our length may vary, but He wants us all to be the same thickness. So He didn't just redeem us from being a sinner; He reconciled us to Himself, and He reconciled us to each other. He did that through the death of His Son.

Now, you have to remember that in the biblical world the temple stood, and in that temple was a wall that said if you were a Gentile, you could not go past this wall. If you did, you would be killed. Gentiles would stand and watch Jews go through that little doorway with that big sign there that warned them not to enter because there was a holy God, and they had to stay far away. But even the Jew when he got in father and got nearer to God, there was a curtain. That curtain wouldn't let a Jew come into the presence of God, just one Jew one day of the year. So that's why Paul says the Gentiles were far away and the Jews were near, yet nobody was with God. So what God did was, in the death of His Son He tore down that wall that separated races, and then He tore that curtain that separated the races from Him. That's why he says for by one spirit we both have access to the Father. I wanted you to see this. It's hard for us to fathom this, but in this temple that God is building, there are no walls, there are no curtains. Now, we like walls. If I can just be honest, we are so glad we've got walls that separate us from First Fruits Farm. Worship would be horrible if we had to worship hearing what's going on in First Fruits Farm, so we like walls. Some of you in your Sunday school class like walls because you want to be separated from those on this side, and on that side, of you, so we're just used to walls. In this temple that God is building, He is not building a place; He's building a people. In this people, who are now a new race of people, there are no walls; there are no curtains. See, God's temple is going to be international, not one nation, and it's going to be interracial. Whoa...God never wanted the church to be American, to be Russian, to be Chinese; He wanted the church to be international. He also

wanted us to be interracial. He didn't want me to look at you and see that you were different from me and I was different from you because of our race, or our gender, or our socioeconomic place in life. He wanted there to be a true race where there was no divisions and no hiding. That's why He put His Son on a cross, is to build a holy temple.

So then, you who have been redeemed by God, you have been reconciled by God, reconciled with Him, that vertical aspect Kory talked about, reconciled with each other, that horizontal aspect he talked about last week, "so then you are no longer strangers and aliens." I can't help reading this without thinking about every time I go to Brazil. I get off the airplane in Manaus, go down the hallway, come around a turn, and there is that sign I dread. I hate that sign. That sign says, "Nationals." That's Brazilians. Then there's that other sign and I have to walk toward that other sign. There aren't many of us. It is saying "Foreigner," but when you read it in Portuguese, it looks like our English word stranger. I just stepped off the plane in Brazil, and the automatically let me know I'm a stranger. I'm a stranger. They've just told me that, I'm now standing before the custom guy, and I want to say, "Check out my visa; I've been coming to Brazil since 1994!" It doesn't matter. I don't have a birth certificate saying I was born in Brazil, so I'm not a national; I'm a foreigner. Can I be honest with you? The first few years I went to Brazil, as soon as I stepped past that immigration officer, I knew I was a stranger. They talk different, they look different, and they act different. I didn't know how to order. By the time I got where I was going down the Amazon River, I would like for you to tell some of those guys that I was a stranger. As a matter of fact, if I can say this, they have made me feel so at home sometimes I wake up wondering if I'm about a third Brazilian now. About three times a year, I try to convince Celisa to just move with me to the bank of the Amazon River. There's something about that that appeals to me. It's the reason she won't go on a mission trip with me to Brazil, she's afraid I won't bring us back home. Do you get what I'm saying?

Do any of you remember when you were outside of Christ and you stepped into the church for the first time, and everybody knew what to do, but you didn't know what to do? You felt like a stranger. It humbles and hurts me,

but most of you that are here tell me the first time you came, you said you were never coming back because you stood in the foyer waiting to get in, people were everywhere, and everybody knew what to do and where to go and you had no clue. Everybody had a friend but you and you felt like you were different. We don't want that! God says that's the way we lived when we were outside of the church, but once we came inside the church, there are no strangers, no aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household!

I don't want anybody to misunderstand what I just said earlier. I am so proud to be a citizen of the United States of America. I love my country. Can I just be on record saying, as a pastor, not as a prophet, I do not like what's been going on the last ten, twelve years as a country where our politicians are trying to divide us as a country. I don't like it! I am a citizen of the greatest country on the face of the planet, amen. And as a citizen of this great country, I have a birth certificate that says I am a citizen of this country and I know I have rights, and there's nobody who can take my rights away from me.

That's what God wants you to know as a Christian who has been redeemed from sin, and you're being reconciled by God, but you have rights! You are a fellow citizen, not of a country here, but of a heavenly country. You are a citizen of the kingdom of God! But you can get lost in that; it's so big, it's so massive, so he says you're also a member of the family of God. Can I just say this? If you've been redeemed and you've been reconciled, you're a son of God. You're a daughter of God. Jesus Christ is your brother, and everybody else who is his brother or sister is your brother or sister. Did you get that? Do you know what that means? There are no grandpas, no grandmas, no uncles and aunts, no nephews and nieces, no first, second, fourth, fifth cousin in the church, in this holy temple. We are all brothers and sisters.

See, I think citizenship is reminding me of my right as a citizen of the kingdom of God, but being a family member reminds me of my responsibilities. If I can be totally honest with you, I don't ever remember explaining to any of my kids or grandkids about their rights as a family member, but I've had to do a lot of explaining about responsibilities. As a

matter of fact, last night we were at a lovely wedding. Jordan and Josh got married. We were sitting on a bale of hay, we've got four grandkids, we've got our son, or daughter, and Celisa was beside me. Right when the ceremony started, all four grandkids got hungry at the same time. Kory has got to do the opening prayer, and they all get hungry! And they are letting us know they are hungry. God bless my daughter, Katie, but she just did not put enough in there to feed all of us at that time. G went for whatever was in the bag. He pulled it out, opened it up, and started gulping it down in front of his little sister, Evie Kate. I did not address Evie Kate and say, "Evie Kate, Garnet has the right to drink all of that." I turned to Garnet and said, "Garnet, you better save some of that for your little sister. You are her big brother." He didn't want to, but he did. Why? That was his sister!

Would you look around? I know this blows some of your minds who come from a small physical family and you only had one or two brothers or sisters, but you're in a family full of a couple of thousand people! Don't ever bring up your right to me as family; bring up to me your responsibility. You used to be a stranger, you used to be an alien, you're a brother, a sister, and you're welcome at the table. You have the same responsibility for tearing down the wall as I have the responsibility of tearing down the wall.

"So then," we are no longer who we used to be; we are now in the family of God. We're a citizen "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief cornerstone." Yeah, it's construction language. We've got a master carpenter going to work to now. In those days, they didn't build temples out of wood; they built temples out of stone. So here's the picture; you're a stone. You come to the stone, Jesus, rejected by men, but in God's sight, He is chosen; He's precious. As a living stone, we're being built into a spiritual house, a spiritual priesthood. It says we're being built together, built on the foundation. Don't try to make this be apostles and prophets. Don't try to make this be Old Testament, New Testament. If it had been New Testament, Old Testament, he would have said prophets and apostles. He says apostles and prophets. The church had prophets too. If you turn to 1 Corinthians 12:28, who did God first set in the church? Apostles, then

prophets. See, God wanted the foundation of his temple to be the teaching ministry of the apostles and the prophets who He would inspire by the Holy Spirit to not just speak God's revelation, but write God's revelation to us. Did you catch that? So, can I just say this? We'll never have a family meeting where we will decide how we want to do things because our family is not built on speculation or reasoning, or philosophy, our foundation is God's revelation to us through His Word. We are a people of the Book. It broke my heart, and don't say anything to me when I tell you this, but the other day I had a person tell me they interacted with a person about a certain issue, and this person said to them, "Well, I guess we just need to change the Bible to be more in line with what modern culture believes." Guys, just about every Christian in just about every church is going that direction, but the true church of Jesus Christ will not. It's not going to be pretty for the church in America if Jesus tarries much longer, but the church in America will be faithful because our foundation is the Word of God, Jesus Christ, Himself, being the cornerstone.

I look over here at Jevan. He is a bricklayer, a block layer, and I think he would agree with me (Jevan, if you don't, don't saying anything, ok?) that block layers will almost let anybody lay blocks on the straights, but you've got to know what you're doing to lay the first block. Am I right, Jevan? Have you ever noticed that block layers don't go to the middle of the straight? They get in the corner and put that block. That block has to be right because if that first block isn't right, the whole foundation is wrong. Everything in that foundation is related to that cornerstone. Do you know who the cornerstone of the temple is? Do you know who the cornerstone of the church is? It is Jesus Christ. It's not your mom, not your dad, not your Sunday school teacher, not your pastor, not a deacon, not a missionary, not the person who led you to Christ; it's Christ Himself. We not only have a relationship with God through His written Word, we have a relationship with God through the Living Word, His Son Jesus Christ, and the whole church depends on being in a right relationship with Him. That's why the most important thing you can do is make sure you are connected to the cornerstone and you are right with Him, because everything flows out of that relationship.

Then it says, referring to Christ, "...in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple..." Holy temple...a house says something about its occupants. The church of Jesus Christ should say God is holy.

Now watch this last verse: "In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit." It brings in the work of the Father, the work of the Son, and the work of the Holy Spirit. In Christ, the salvation that we have in Him, the Holy Spirit is taking us as stones, joining us together. It is one thing to be a brick. Bricks are uniform; they all look alike. Just pick one up and put it where it goes. Stone, that's different. Sometimes a stone won't fit, so it's got to be cut, it's got to have an edge knocked off. This last week Celisa and I had two incidents in our life where we are just now seeing why things had happened years ago. We realized what was happening was that God was knocking some edges off of us. Once you get that edge knocked off, you see things differently. Are any of you having God do that in your life right now? He's still working on us. I don't know that I'm right on this, so I have the right to change my mind, but it's almost like in these first verses he is talking about how the church is this universal, international, inner relational body, building, that inhabits the world. But then, in each location God wants there to be a visible manifestation of what's called the universal invisible church, so he says, "...you also are being built together as a dwelling place for God by the Spirit." So I think here's what he wants us to know. God not only wanted the Ephesian church and the church in Rome to be a church that manifests the presence of God, He wants Hardin to also. That's why God is doing what He's doing in your life. It's to make you part of a church to where God makes His presence known.

You guys remember the 25th wedding anniversary of Celisa and me. You graciously sent us to England and Scotland for three weeks. It was glorious! Thank you for that. Let me just remind you that next year is my 35th anniversary as a pastor, just throwing that out there...but anyway, we found ourselves in England. I'm Scottish, but my wife being English, she loves the kings and queens. We were standing in Buckingham palace outside the gate, and we look at each other and have this thought: I

wonder if the queen's home. Now, I'm sure had she known that Bro Ricky and Sister Celisa were outside the gate, she would want us to come in for tea. But we knew that wasn't going to happen, because when we looked up at the flagpole, the flag that was flying was the Union Jack. The Union Jack represents England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland as the United Kingdom. When they fly that flag from the top of one of the queen's residences, that tells all the people the queen is not home. Celisa and I knew before we went that Queen Elizabeth's summer home is in Scotland at Balmoral, and we knew she wasn't in Buckingham Palace but was in Balmoral. If we had been standing outside Balmoral, there would not have been the Union Jack flying on top of the flagpole, there would have been the Royal Standard, the queen's own flag. The way the people of England know when the queen is in residence is by the flag that's being flown.

Do you get where I'm going? Do you know how we know God is in residence in His church? It's by the presence of the Holy Spirit within each of us. Wouldn't it be sad if someone went into a local church today and instead of seeing a church under the control of the Holy Spirit of God, they saw a church under the unredeemed flesh of man? I don't ever want anyone to visit Hardin and not know God was in His house. Amen! We are His house. Paul wanted our eyes to be open to this truth, the eyes of our heart because God takes you and me and puts us together to show the world who He is. Will you help us have no walls, have no curtain, and be the people God wants us to be? Will you do that?