

You are God's Brick

(A Message from Africa)



Ephesians 2:19-22

What a privilege it is to be here on a brand new first day of the week as we begin to worship our Lord and Savior and be ready for the rest of the week. Thank you for the opportunity to have given Celisa and I the opportunity to go to Malawi and visit Josh, Stacey, and our daughter as they minister there under the umbrella of Gospel Life in the country of Malawi in the continent of Africa. Thank you so much for your prayers. It was such a blessing and I look forward in the weeks ahead to give you a report on what God is doing there. We're going to preach a topical message this morning. I can't tell you how humbled I am to be the pastor of this church and realize that a little kid who was raised in Dexter KY gets to go to other places in the world because of the gospel of Jesus Christ and because of your generosity.

As I was walking the streets and roads, I got to go in cornfields, into potato patches and tomato fields, I just felt at home there. Even before I left, I had one of those experiences I have from time to time where I fall way short of the standard of Christ, but He is my hero, my example, my life. Much of the things I try to do I try to mirror after Him, and as a

teacher/preacher, He is my example. One of the things I love about the Lord is how He would be out in a community and He would see a farmer sowing seed, and He would say something like "the kingdom of heaven is like..." I had a couple of those experiences last week. I really felt like if Jesus had been with me in Malawi and I was observing and He was teaching He would pick something out of their culture and say, "the kingdom of heaven is like..." When I went there, I knew it was going to be poor. I had been told by Kiki and by Josh how poor the country was, but I have been on the bank of the Amazon River, in the mountains of Nicaragua, but I had never seen poverty like I saw in Malawi. In the midst of all of the poverty, I saw something that I didn't think I would see. Every church building, every house, every building was made of bricks. I wasn't expecting that. Years ago when Celisa and I built our house, we had to make that decision between a brick and a vinyl house, and we couldn't afford to build a brick house, so we built a vinyl house. I still have that thought even today as I drive down the roads and see some of you in your brick homes. I think...*they're rich!* So you can imagine how shocked the Malawian people were when I told them how envious I was that they live in a brick house, and back home in Kentucky I live in a vinyl house. They got a laugh out of that. Here's what's neat about the three churches you're going to see on the screen; each one of those bricks in those churches are handmade. Every house I saw, every building I saw had handmade bricks. Being raised in Kentucky, I've never seen handmade bricks. As a matter of fact, when someone bricks their home, they order bricks that are all uniform. They're just alike. That makes easier for a brick mason to have bricks that are just alike. In Malawi, there is some uniformity to their bricks, but when I got to examine those bricks, each one was unique. I had this thought...if Jesus had been walking among the Malawian people, there would have been a couple of occasions where He would have stopped and said, 'Do you know what? The kingdom of heaven is like...' then He would have taken their brick and made a spiritual application to them. I actually got to do that in a church on Sunday. As I got ready for today, I thought it would be good if we do the same thing this morning. I'm going to take something that I saw in Malawi, something that I've never seen before, and try to make application to us from a long, long, long way from Malawi.

I was so privileged to be walking down the street and met this man who showed me how he makes bricks (video plays of man making bricks by hand in a four-part mold). It was so neat! It is dry season in Malawi, so when you can reach down and pick up the soil it just falls through your fingers. It is so dry that not a grain in their soil will hold together. What is neat is that every house I attended, every church that I was in, the bricks weren't brought from far away, they were made right there on their very property. That soil that will not hold together, they can take water, pour it on the soil, take their fingers, mix it together, and the next thing you know, that soil take on a new nature, a new characteristic. Instead of being soil that falls apart, it will actually clump together and hold together. Amazing! Once they do that, they use a mold. The man in the video was industrious because he had a mold where he could make four bricks at a time. Most of the people that I saw only had one brick mold. Every brick in the house made from an individual mold, one at a time. He packed that new soil with a new nature into that mold, and it began to form that soil. Because it was moist, because it was pliable, it could be squeezed in, packed in, and the excess would be trimmed off. Once he flipped that mold over and those four bricks came out, they would lay them in the sun. Bricks will be laid in piles, and the sun will begin to dry those bricks. This is on the continent of Africa, but because it's below the equator, it's wintertime there now, which means it was about seventy degrees in the day and forty-five to fifty at night. When summer comes and the rainy season begins, it will get up to maybe eighty or eighty-five degrees and at night it will be in the sixties. Because it's not a hot, hot country, the bricks have to lay in the sun for many days, many weeks, and many months in order for them to allow the moisture to dry from that brick. Very few people would build a house with sun-dried brick only, so once that brick has been dried in the sun, you would heat it up, fire up, or put in an oven. I saw stacks of brick all over Malawi stacked high with three openings to put wood in under the bricks (there is very little wood in the country of Malawi), and they fire those bricks. The bricks are stacked and laid where the heat comes up through those bricks to dry them out. The bricks go from a dark color to a bright red color. The true color the brick does not come out until the brick has been fired. I couldn't help it, but while I was

seeing this all around me, I had this Scripture passage come to my mind, Ephesians 2:19-22. I want to take what the Malawians do every day of their lives and let us see spiritually how that represents what God does when He begins to build His house, the church.

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."

(Prayer)

Father, add your blessings to the reading of this your Word. Father, we normally don't preach topical messages here, but verse by verse. This morning, we just feel being home fresh from Malawi that you have burned a thought into our minds, and I want us to see afresh not just what you are doing in the country of Malawi, but what you're doing right here in Hardin Kentucky. Open our eyes to the truth. It is in your Son's name we pray, amen.

Building His House Brick by Brick

You know this to be true. God is building His house. Just as a Malawian will take soil, pour water on the soil, and the water combining with it, with the scratching of the fingers, that soil becomes different. It's as if its nature changes. It changes from soil that can't stick together, literally, to a soil that becomes sticky. It's as if right before your eyes you see a change. I want to say that's what God is doing in your life and my life. He took you, He took me, a sinner, under the influence of God's Word and God's Holy Spirit by a sovereign act of Himself, He began a work of regeneration, a work of justification in your life and my life, and the next thing you know,

when we heard the gospel, we responded by faith. When we responded by faith, it was as if we became brand new. It was as if our nature changed. Scripture will say we were dead to God, alive to sin, but now after salvation we are now alive to God and dead to sin. My nature before wanted to walk according to my unredeemed flesh, but now my nature wants to walk according to the Spirit of God, and it is as if I am brand new. My life didn't used to hold together very well, but now, under the grace of God and the new nature that He's given me it's amazing how sticky I am.

Uniform Mold, Each Brick Unique

I don't want us to go too far back in memory lane, but how many of us can remember not being a Christian? Do you remember? Look at us now, wow! If we were to look around this morning, there is some uniformity in all of us, yet in our uniformity, there is still room for uniqueness. Each one of us is just like a Malawian brick; we've been handmade by God. If you step back and look at us from a distance, we all look similar, but once you get to know us, we're uniquely different. Why are we different? Why are we not clones? Why are we disciples of Christ? It is because God ordained for each one of us to be unique because He had a plan, and the plan was not for us just to be a brick, but for us to be used by Him to build His house. I don't know if you've ever had this thought or not, but I believe this with all of my heart. I believe all of my life has been designed for me to be where I am today, and that's part of Hardin Baptist Church. I don't know how long you've been with us, but I want to say that everything you have experienced up until this moment us because God has had a plan for you to be where you are right now, and that's with us here at Hardin because God is not only building a church in Malawi, He's building His church in Hardin Kentucky too at this very moment. While there is uniformity with us with all of our sister churches, Hardin will always be unique because you're unique, and I'm unique, and we've been planned this way by God.

- **Uniformity-God's mold is Jesus Christ**

Why is there uniformity? Just as the Malawian man had a four brick mold and other farmers had a one brick mold, God has a mold too. That mold is Jesus Christ. I hope you realize this. If you don't, please hear me. The

moment God saved you He already had a plan. He had a blueprint of what you were going to look like because He knew you were going to be a part of this church. The Bible says it this way, "Those He foreknew, He also predestined." Don't let that word scare you. It just means He blueprinted, He had a plan before He started. Those of us who He blueprinted would be conformed into the image of His Son that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. 1 Peter chapter 2 says we, as living stones, come to the Living Stone so that we can be built into a spiritual house to offer praise and prayer to God. Did you get that? God took you at salvation and decided He was going to mold you into the person of Jesus Christ.

- **Ridding the Excess-skimming ungodliness out of your life**

That man in the video packed the soil into the mold, and then he took his hand and wiped off the excess. Anything that wouldn't fit into that mold, anything that wasn't moldable, he got rid of. That is what God is doing in your life. Please hear me. His plan is for you to be like Christ. That means every situation you're in, whether it's a home, whether it's at work, or at school, as a parent, as a spouse, an employee, or employer, as a member of an organization, God wants every action of yours to be like Christ. He wants every thought you have to be like Christ. That's why sometimes you feel like you're getting squeezed. Anything and everything in you that's not like Christ, (and you know you have plenty) God is skimming it out of your life. Can I ask you a question? Why would you want to be like you when you can be like Him? Why do you resist God's work in your life? I hate to tell you this, but it's come to my attention (and I'm 58 years old and I've been doing this a long time because I've been walking with Christ since I was 13); it seems like every event in my life where He is molding me, it usually involves people. Can I just be truthful? It takes some of you being you to make me realize that what's in me is not what should be in me. No disrespect, but some of you just don't have it together. I want to blame you for acting the way I act. Don't look at me that way; you do the same thing. We want to believe we wouldn't have thought what we thought, we wouldn't have done what we did, if so and so hadn't done what they did. We wanted to be mad at so and so for what they did and we want to put our eyes on them, when in reality, God is letting us be in that relationship

so that we see who we really are! Without that in your life, you wouldn't know how impatient you were, you wouldn't know how unforgiving you are, you wouldn't know how vengeful you are, and you wouldn't ever dream some of the things you put in a text or post on social media. And you want to blame somebody else. No, it's God so loving you that He's got a mold, and that mold is the person of Jesus Christ. He wants you and me to be like Jesus Christ, so He's going to allow some things to happen to get those things out of us. Without those, we would never see what's really in us. Please tell me this makes sense.

- **Firing the Brick-maturing and sanctifying your walk with Christ**

Then do you know what He does? He wants to mature us. He wants to sanctify us because He knows we're going to be part of something bigger than ourselves, and He knows in us being bigger than ourselves He knows how important it is for us to be whom we're supposed to be. Until we're who we're supposed to be, the church will never be who it's supposed to be. If you think you're in a church that can cover your weaknesses, you've missed it. If you think you can just come in and just sit in a pew, you've missed it. We will never be who God wants us to be until you are who you're supposed to be. So guess what God does. He's got to dry us out. He's got to mature us. It starts with a walk. It starts with a Malawian brick sitting in the sun, basking in the sunlight, and that warmth warms that brick up, and starts pulling that moisture out. When that moisture starts coming out, because of the new nature of the brick, the brick stays together. That brick becomes harder and it can now be picked up. When it's picked up after it's dried out, it doesn't fall apart. That's why the Bible talks about us not being drunk with wine but being filled with the Spirit. It's why the Bible tells us not to walk in the flesh, but walk according to the Spirit. As you and I learn to be filled with the Spirit, learn to walk with God, learn to get into God's Word, and learn to fellowship with God's people, we develop a walk with Him. As we walk with Him, He matures us. Through His Word and His Spirit, we become more and more like Jesus.

I want to tell you what I learned in Malawi. I saw it with my own eyes. I saw buildings with dark brick, and buildings with a beautiful bright red

brick. At first I thought, whoa, they've got two kinds of soil. Then a guy told me no, "The dark building is produced by sundried brick only." I said, "The dark brick can look like the red brick?" and they said, "Yes, but the difference is it's got to go through the fire." I only saw one church built in sundried brick. There was a sweet little pastor of about thirty people named Donald. They were so excited because in the last four years, thirty something people had been saved and baptized. So as they built their church, they couldn't wait for their brick to bake, they just built it out of sundried brick.

I went in the church and sat down on his pew. It was just dirt; a pew made out of dirt! There were about five of them, no concrete, no carpet, or no tile. This man was so thankful that Hardin Baptist Church is sponsoring Gospel Life to be there. I wish you could have heard him talk about Dr. Joshua and how he is teaching them about Christ. While I was preaching on a Sunday morning in Pastor Donald's church, they give Celisa and Kiki the seat of hospitality, which means they sat behind me while I was preaching. That was an experience having your wife and your daughter behind you while you're preaching! There was a visiting pastor who heard an American was there and going to preach, so he didn't preach in his church, he came to hear me preach, and when I announced Ephesians 2:19-22, I didn't see it, but Celisa said, "Hon, he never found it." That visiting pastor of a church never found the book of Ephesians. They are so thankful there for Dr. Joshua being there to teach them what they call "The advanced knowledge of Christ." I can't tell you how many times they told me to thank you for letting Kiki be there, knowing you're making it possible for her to be there. We saw people sit for eight o'clock in the morning until three o'clock in the afternoon to be treated and never complained, never moved, and waiting their turn patiently to be treated by her and a doctor.

See, this little church couldn't wait to build a church to the Lord. But most Malawians know when rainy season comes and it starts raining cats and dogs, it is bad. I walked in potato and cornfields there and the farmers hand ridge their hills with hoes. It is so bad during the rainy season that when they plant their crops, the ridges had to be hoed really, really deep. That's how much rain they get, so when they build a brick home, they put

it in an oven and bake. When they light that fire under it, some of the bricks crumble, some crack. I saw refuse piles where bricks were tossed. Then, I would see a beautiful red brick building and that true color of the brick had come out because of the firing. This dawned on me, and I knew this practically, intellectually, it makes such good sense. That's why the Bible says to count it all joy, brothers, when your faith is tested, when you go through a trial, a tribulation. Here's the truth. We will never know what your true color is, and you'll never know what mine is until I go through the furnace fire. That's why we all sit back in amazement at the guy who preached, the guy who taught Sunday school, the guy who was a deacon, a song leader, and suddenly life got tough and he quit! He cracked! He didn't make it! We want to make excuses. No, you either are, or you're not. If I can be totally honest with you, you'll never know who you really are until God heats up your life. When He does, that's when the true color comes out. Do you know why some of us have hotter fires than other fires? It's because there's a lot of junk God has to get out of some of us. A lot of us didn't start at the same place. Some of us didn't start with a dad who's been a preacher and a granddad who's been a preacher and a great-granddad who's been a preacher. Some of us weren't raised in a five generation Christian home. Some of us come in this for the first time, brand new to Christianity and our flesh is still weak. God saved you and is molding you into the image of Jesus, He's letting you walk with the Son, but I'm telling you, don't count it strange, brother! You are more precious to God than gold! If a goldsmith has to heat a fire under gold to refine it, God will heat you to refine you.

- **Uniqueness-uniquely handmade by God to bring honor and glory to Him**

I want you to know that some of the fires you and I have been through were because God wanted you to be where you are right now, and that's a member of Hardin Baptist church. He's building a handmade body here. While there's uniformity, there's also uniqueness. I want to say that next time God heats up your life, don't ask Him to quit. Don't ask Him to dial it down. Fall on your face and say thank you, God, I'm getting ready to see who I really am. What a God! Can you imagine if those Malawian bricks

could talk, if they really had feelings, senses? Do you know how good life is for a brick in Malawi until it starts going to that fire? If that brick knew what was coming, that brick would complain every ounce of the way *please don't put me in the fire!* Don't even pray that to God. He knows what you need to bring out who you really are, and you won't know who you are until you go through the fire.

Once that brick gets made, those Malawian people bring those bricks together that have been tested by the fire. They're hard. They're mature, and then they begin to stack them together, but notice there is cement all around that brick. They don't just lay them together on top of each other; they cement them together. Here's what I want to ask you this morning. Are you cemented at Hardin? Or, are you just a brick touching another brick? It's really easy when you're at a church like this to just be in the group, but not be of the group, to be with us, but not be us. I think God wants you to be us. I think He made you special; He made you unique. What makes you unique is you have a spiritual gift that God gave you the moment you were born again. You don't have this gift because of your momma or daddy. You have this gift totally because of your heavenly Father. I'm telling you, when He saved me at 13, He had this day in mind. The same thing is true of you. When He saved you, He had this day in mind. No matter how you got here, God had this day in mind. He's given you something that is uniquely you, a spiritual giftedness that this body needs. Without you being cemented to us, we'll never be as strong as we need to be. So I want to suggest to you, based on Ephesians 4:11-16 where the Bible teaches that God gives pastors to churches so they equip the saints, the saints do the work of ministry, and it's the work of ministry that edifies the body, what holds us together is ministry. It is where you take hold of someone else, who's taking hold of someone else, who's taking hold of someone else, who's taking hold of someone else, and you realize God has gifted you for that ministry. Give yourself to that ministry, and you help that side of the church, and he helps this side of the church, and she helps that side of the church, and we help all sides of the church be who the church is supposed to be because you are being who you're supposed to be.

Now, I understand not all of you have been raised in a big family. I can tell you the blessings of being raised in a big family, the blessing of me being a Bogard. I can't tell you the blessing of showing up at a family dinner, introducing myself to people and finding out they were my fourth cousin, and I had never seen him before in my life. That was a good thing! As a Bogard, I had to learn to share. I can't ever remember having Granny Bogard all to myself because I always had to share her with my sister, with Cousin Deanna, Cousin Terry, Cousin Dale, Cousin Tonya, and so on because we are the Bogards. We're the family of God. How dare we want to keep God to ourselves! How dare we want to be the only ones! No! Yes, God's building you into a Christian, but He is doing it so you can be a part of something bigger than you and I can be a part of something bigger than me, and that is being a part of the house of God! It is a house that's handmade by Him so we bring honor and glory to Him! So when the storm come and many lives in our community get blown to pieces, the house of God still stands because we are built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. God has been doing everything He's been doing in our life to get us ready for this moment we're in because God wants to live in His church. Continue to let God doing what He's doing in your life as an individual, but understand He's only doing that because you're part of us, and we're part of you. Together, we're handmade by God.