

Building – the Church

There is much in Scripture about foundations. The foundation of truth, Jesus the cornerstone of our faith, and building on the rock – the Rock that is Christ. We also know – I hope – that we are being **built into** the church. It's a process.

This morning I want to look a little at the process. One important thing I want to point out is that we have as much responsibility towards one another as members of a family; as Christian brothers and sisters... in *many* ways.

But one *particular* responsibility we have is to **build one another up**.

It will always be unfinished work because there is much in this world and in society that seeks to tear us down – emotionally, physically and spiritually. The local church body will always be unfinished and incomplete for this reason and also because imperfect people are being built into it and not everyone who *will* come in *has* come in or *will have come in* until the Final Day.

There are those of us who have been *built in* for a long while. There are those who began being built in elsewhere and were discarded, displaced, misplaced or simply fell off the wall. There may be those here who haven't yet somehow been set quite firmly enough in place, and maybe others who were once firmly set but have been jolted, nudged or pushed a bit loose.

Any builder looking at an old building that has been through the wars would immediately see the weak spots.

Anyone noticed any weak spots in the building work here in Pego recently? More importantly - are you just an observer and a critic or are you a builder? A repairer of walls?

Isaiah 58:6-12 *"Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.'*

*If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; **you shall be called the repairer of the breach**, the restorer of streets to dwell in.*

In the midst of Isaiah's dialogue there are a lot of 'if's and 'then's. If you do this, then I will do that. God's relationship with us is always covenantal. He enters into agreements with us where we have a part to play. If we want to be called "repairer of the breach" – the one who built up the damaged walls – then we must do things God's way, not ours.

Do you want to build up God's church this morning, or are you more interested in *being* built up? Society has become more about what we can **get** than what we can **give**. If we bring that mentality into the church when we come we will only enjoy the experience if we get something out of it. But God's plan is much smarter than that!

It is this – God has called us **to build one another up**. If you concentrate truly on building someone else up – and if we all agree that's what this church body is about – then **if** we are doing 'church' God's way - someone will be concentrating on building you up! That has to be good news!!

Romans 15:1-4 *We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me." For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

I think this is a great Scripture for several reasons. First, we all have strengths and weaknesses. Where each of us is strong we can bear the weakness of those who are weak in that area. Where each of us is weak, someone who is strong in that area can bear our weaknesses. It's a perfect plan..... **if** we need to be built up and supported in an area of weakness, **if** the church has been faithful and obedient, **then** God will have put someone close by with a "strength" to build us up.

Watch carefully though that this means *self-denial* – it will cost us something – it has to be *sacrificial* not *superficial*. If there is *no cost* it has *no value*..... we must watch our motivations.

This next Scripture exhorts us to be operating out of faith, love and a sure hope of our own salvation.... living (dwelling, abiding) with Jesus. Building each other up should be a part of our walk of salvation – a part of our Christian life-style – an everyday part of our walk with Christ.....

1 Thess 5:5-11 *For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. **Therefore** encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.*

This next Scripture may seem a little contradictory in that we should be able to build our individual selves up. But notice that the whole Scripture is in the plural. The writer is talking to a group of people. He doesn't say "build yourself up" but "build yourselves up". We build each other up as a group....

Jude 17-21 *But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions." It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.*

Let's look again at the Isaiah Scripture to see exactly how he saw this working.

The context of the whole section is one of fasting. I have already pointed out that this process should cost us something – we should give of ourselves to please and strengthen the other weaker person.

Verses **6** and **9** talk about *yokes, bonds* and *freedom*. Without wanting to spend too long on any one section let me just say that this speaks to me of forgiveness – releasing someone of the debt – letting someone off the hook of our judgement – letting them go free. We can't build someone up if we are holding a grudge against them – pointing the finger at them - counting them responsible for our hurt or upset condition. We must free ourselves and then them of this yoke if we are to help them. Our weaknesses often hurt others.... We must rise above the urge to separate ourselves from the weak and embrace them instead.

Verses **7** and **10** talk about the *naked, hungry* and *homeless*. In the context of our Christian family the literal sense of this in the unlikely one, although it may be relevant in certain circumstances. In the spiritual sense we feed the hungry on the Word of God, we clothe them in garments of righteousness – unearned – by grace and with mercy, and we give them a home in the church. We must learn to see each other's nakedness and cover each other up. We can learn to "cover" for one another in areas of weakness – not gossip about them and expose them – that's Satan's work, not God's. Where we see a lack of wisdom and understanding we help others with Scriptural helps with gentle wisdom not "shovel" theology. Where someone has no spiritual home we welcome them and make them at home amongst us.

IF we can manage to do this, God says, THEN this will be our reward –

1. *"Your light will break forth like the dawn", "your righteousness shall go before you"* - when you speak on God's behalf people will want to listen - your witness will be powerful!
2. *"the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard"* - God Himself will watch your back!
3. *"your healing shall spring up speedily"* - you get healed quicker!
4. *"Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.'" - God will answer your prayers as soon as you ask!*
5. *"the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail."* - Well, what more of a blessing could anyone possibly want?

This all sounds like perfect Christianity to me - rapid healing, God's protection, answered prayers, strong witness, satisfied desires, strong bones..... and all because...

... because you built people up around you... you forgave them and helped them and advised them gently in the Word and loved them and welcomed them..... that doesn't sound so hard, does it?

Let's become a church of builders..... I want to be called "a restorer of broken walls" or as Isaiah puts it "a repairer of the breach". Is that what you want - the restoration of hearts and minds and relationships?

Do we want strong walls here in The King's Church or are we just be satisfied with a good foundation and not much else?

Are we going to BE family or just play at "happy families"? I believe we're actually doing reasonably well..... but I also believe we can do better.

1 Thess 5:11 *Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, **just as you are doing.***