

Sunday 07 February 2010. 10.30am
BUILDING, OUTREACH, BELONGING. X6. JTH.

1 Peter 2; 1 – 10. Building with living stones.

Recap/ Intro.

The Master's Plan.

- ❖ God builds God's Kingdom – at the coming of Jesus the new heaven and new earth will be established.
- ❖ But God has planned in such a way that this work of making everything new takes place in partnership with his creatures – especially human beings made in his image. (Beware ducking your head when the Boss is looking for volunteer builders!)
- ❖ This building is not happening in some far distant place (some off site heavenly construction site) – no it is here in this world – in this earth and heavens.

What do we build with?

- ❖ All that is good, true, righteous will be part of the new heaven and earth – the new world.
- ❖ All of creation will be redeemed – space, matter, time. (This is shown in the resurrection of Jesus) e.g. plant a tree that may take 300 years to mature not just for your descendants but it may well be part of the new heaven and earth.
- ❖ Build with values and actions that will survive God's judgement of what is "good" – we have thought about building with both justice and mercy. As Becca said last week we must build with things that will pass through the "fire" of God's judgement. Do not build carelessly but with thought and intent.
- ❖ We will be saved by the grace of God (not our hard work) but surely we want to build things that will be saved *as through fire*. When we build we are not restoring an ancient relic called the church – no we are building for the new heaven and earth.

<p>We are building with <i>living stones</i> – people: we are building relationships using the principles of love for God and love for neighbour. 1 Peter 2: 1 – 10.</p>
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It is important to note that Peter did not stress his importance or go on about himself – he spoke of Jesus- The Living Stone and all the other living stones. He like Paul is keen to establish that Jesus is the only foundation and also the corner stone (v6) – the example. Peter is a teacher and a leader helping to equip God's people to be involved in the building of a new world – using their gifts, skills, time and money in this.

This building is going to involve OUTREACH – reaching out and inviting the living stones to join in and also building them into the Kingdom – helping them to BELONG and to contribute, as well as receive. (All of this is for God's glory and also the shalom – or well being of humanity).

STONES – vv 4-8.

Peter moves on from talking about baby Christians moving on the mature adult Christians as he talks about architecture and building. He is talking about building a temple a place of worship – but not as we know it – this is a building made with people and so he talks about *living stones*.

All over the world Jesus is building his Church - this church is indestructible – even *death will not prevail against it* because of the Resurrection. Governments and other people may persecute and despise it but it will remain and grow. Stone by stone it is built as one person after another offers themselves to God through trusting in the work of Jesus Christ. No living stone is rejected – no matter how oddly shaped – if they come genuinely and each can be built into God’s people and come to belong.

How to we join in and become a part of this new construction?

V4 COME TO THE LORD, the living stone rejected by people as worthless....

V5 Come as living stones and let yourselves be used in building the spiritual temple, where you will serve as holy priests to offer spiritual and acceptable sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ.

This is how we become members of the people of God and we join the church by the visible and outward expression of Baptism.

An implication of this is that we BELONG to one another.

If we are to be a building not just a pile of stones then we need to be stuck together with a purpose. That is a living, moving building of people serving God and offering sacrifices to God. (e.g. the sacrifice of praise – a contrite heart and so on).

Jesus is a stumbling stone to some (an offence!) – but to us he is the foundation on which we build with others. We are building a structure not made of bricks and cement or steel and glass – no we are building something that is living, moving and relating – **we are building a community!** Jesus – the Living Stone! – began the building of this new thing when he started calling men and women to himself and began putting these very different men and women under pressure to relate to one another and eat together and serve a common purpose. He called fishermen, tax men, political zealots, Roman soldiers, mothers, wealthy women and so on – he sent his people into all the world to make a truly pan national church. If we fail to build genuine community around the person of Jesus Christ we will fail to build for the Kingdom, for the new heaven and earth.

Practical implications of building with living stones.

(Question on Flame). Time with one another – for example in service together... (A sense of belonging grows).

Christians that have spent time together on some aspect of service often have a clearer sense of their own identity and also that they belong to a bigger group that has purpose. Those people who just talk about “wanting to belong” or “how things used to feel in the past” usually get caught in a terrific rut and keep going round in circles.

Peter talks about servicing God. We have seen how Jesus served God – he was the servant King – he was obedient, he helped others materially and also spiritually, he shared God’s message in clear language, he was amongst the people, he was also with God in prayer, and he worked with his group of disciples.

From this we learn many things about structuring our own lives – all those of us in work and/or with family commitments (not just having children) know that in our very urban, busy world we find it very difficult to spend more than a few hours a week with fellow disciples of Jesus.

Therefore some of us need to spend time together with other Christians in some acts of service – running a small group for prayer and study, working with children on a holiday club, baby gym or some other outreach project, reaching out and visiting those ill or in need, serving on the welcoming team...there are many things we can do – but it is this sense of building more than my family, or my job/ career.

(Some of us of course need to concentrate on the other side of spending time not with other Christians but with those who are not built into the church. We perhaps need to take seriously the opportunity of Hospitality Sundays once a month to spend time with those not in the church of God already. Perhaps to invite someone we work with to a good meal in our home or join them for a pub or café lunch and not rush away.)

All of us have come to Jesus, most of us have not just come to church but actually joined the church but all of us need to consider what time we are investing in building the church – belonging because we serve God together – not just on Sunday in Worship – essential as that is.

We are the living stones of the church – as we relate together – worshipping and serving God we actually come to belong and also build up the church.

There needs to be some degree of co-operation with God and one another in all of this: Let yourselves be used in building the spiritual temple, says Peter. If we don’t work together – if we don’t co-operate then the building will go slower and a side effect will be discouragement or even disappointment. As Becca said last week – you will be saved by Jesus but what will you have to show for how much you love God and others? (I am more than willing – I am eager to talk with any who seriously know that they need an opportunity for service. We are very soon going to be doing a skills audit to find out not just the gifts and skills but whether you are willing to contribute those to the building of the people of God).

My brothers and sisters in Jesus – *Come to Lord – rejected by Israel as worthless but chosen by God as valuable.*

Come as people(living stones) - and let yourselves be used in the building of God’s temple on earth.

Serve God and the people – join together in the works that God gives us to do together!

Amen.