

Built Together in Fellowship

**Called Out
for a
Purpose**

Dave Taylor

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**Notes from four talks at Okehampton
Baptist Church**

Dave Taylor

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Called Out For A Purpose

'On this rock', said the Lord Jesus, 'I will build my Church'. Peter had just made his dramatic statement, putting into words what all the disciples had probably been beginning to understand over the last couple of years: 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'. (**Matthew 16:13-20**) This was a point of no return; the Jewish authorities were adamant: if anyone declared that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the promised Anointed One of God, they were to be excluded from the synagogue (**John 9:22**). That did not just mean exclusion from religious meetings but social exclusion as well. Not surprising that Jesus immediately 'warned the disciples that they should tell no one that he was the Christ'.

The 'bedrock' on which the Lord promised to build had just been demonstrated. Peter had received revelation from the Father to show him who Jesus really was, had believed that revelation, and then had been certain enough to speak it out! His nickname (*Petros* – a stone or boulder) was appropriate. He was made of the same stuff as that bedrock (*petra*).¹

So, when we start thinking and talking about the Church, we need to know two vital facts:

1) It is the Lord Jesus himself who does the building. He may have co-workers, but he is the builder.

2) The foundation needs to be in place before any building can start.
We shall come back to these facts next week.

But what did he mean by 'my Church'? What did the disciples make of it?

The word translated 'church' in the New Testament is not a religious word. It was applied to any gathering of people who had been called out in some way and had come together. The word '*ekklesia*' simply means 'called out' and was used for both the riot in Ephesus and for the 'lawful assembly' (i.e. the courts) where it was suggested that any problems could be resolved.²

When the Lord Jesus used this word himself,³ he was clearly referring to the company of those who believed and followed him.

In New Testament times, many Jews could not read Hebrew fluently, so the Old Testament scriptures were also translated into Greek, the common language of the Roman Empire, and this word '*ekklesia*' turns up again in that translation (the 'Septuagint'), though this time with special meaning for the Jewish people as the nation who had been called out by God himself, and particularly in two settings:-

1) Referring to the time when the whole company of the people of Israel, who had just escaped from the slavery of Egypt, gathered at the foot of the mountain while Moses met with God and was given the Ten Commandments.⁴

2) Referring to the regular gathering of all of Israel to the place where God had chosen to show his presence, initially in the (very mobile) 'tent of meeting' and then in the temple in Jerusalem.⁵

Obviously, a gathering of people who have been called out depends on two factors: A call and the response to that call. There were occasions in the Old Testament when some of the tribes of Israel did not turn up at the gathering as they were expected to. Trouble resulted because there was a clear understanding that it was necessary to respond to the call and come together.

¹ See '[Bedrock](http://www.justonecandle.uk)' from www.justonecandle.uk for a short 'word study' on this.

² **Acts 19:32 & 39**

³ **Matthew 16:18 & 18:17**

⁴ **Deuteronomy 4:10, 9:10 & 18:16 & Acts 7:38**, where '*ekklesia*' is translated 'congregation' or 'assembly'.

⁵ **Joshua 8:35, 1 Kings 8:22** and many more!

Equally, there were strict rules about who could and could not be part of the gathering. The most important of these rules was that you had to be part of God's chosen people, the Jews, although right from the start there was room for outsiders who wanted to be 'joined to' the Jewish nation. In identifying with the people of God, in a very real way they were also responding to his call.¹ Throughout the whole Old Testament there are constant references to the congregation / assembly / gathering of Israel, translated into the Septuagint using the Greek word 'ekklesia' (more than 70 verses!).

So, there in Caesarea Philippi, as Jesus spoke about 'my Church', the disciples will have understood exactly what he meant: a group of people who had gathered together in response to a call – **HIS** call! And they could see the parallels in the history of the Jewish people down the centuries since Moses.

In the same way, if you were a Christian believer in, say, Ephesus, when Paul wrote to you about something he called the church ('ekklesia'), you knew exactly what he meant: a gathering of people who had responded to a call. And as this was the 'ekklesia' of the Lord Jesus Christ, it was understood that each member had responded to his call. If you knew the Jewish scriptures as well, you had the additional benefit of knowing that this word also described the assembling of God's own chosen people over the centuries of their history. A rich word indeed!

How did you know whether you were part of that church? Simple! If you had responded to the call of God in the Lord Jesus Christ, you were in. If you had not responded, you were not in.

So (for example) you could define the church in Ephesus in just four words: **In Christ, in Ephesus.**

For many years, I haven't seen the continuity between the LORD calling out his Chosen People in the Old Testament and Jesus calling out the Church in the New Testament. Quite recently, we were studying Romans in a small study group, and at the same time I was following up questions about the place of the Jewish people in God's plans. One passage really opened up to me: **Romans 11:17-26**, where Paul writes about the fact that Gentiles (non-Jews) who have put their trust in Jesus have been 'grafted in' to the 'olive tree' of God's Chosen People, Israel.

The simple truth that Paul highlights here is that **there is only one olive tree**. So if, like me, you are a Gentile, we who have been joined to Jesus have been grafted into the eternal purposes of God which we can see stretching right through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation! In a very real way, we have become part of what Paul calls 'the Israel of God'.²

The Christians in Galatia were probably mostly Gentiles, and the church in Rome was probably a more even mix of Jews and Gentiles, but in both letters Paul spells it out clearly: *"If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise"* (**Galatians 3:29**).

And Jews who trust in Jesus (whether in New Testament times or now) are simply responding to the call of God in the Lord Jesus, the fulfilment and continuity of many promises in the Old Testament³.

Peter, writing his letter primarily to Jewish believers, underlines the same message and adds an extra level of understanding. In **1 Peter 2:4-10**, he writes *"coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, being built up as a spiritual house into a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"* and *"you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY"*. (The capital letters are quotations from the Old Testament.)

¹ **Numbers 15:15, Deuteronomy 23:1-8, 1 Chronicles 13:1-8, Nehemiah 13:1-3**

² **Galatians 6:16**. See also **Galatians 3:7 & 29, Romans 9:6, Philippians 3:3**

³ One of the best examples is **Jeremiah 31:31-34**, quoted in **Hebrews 8:8-13**

Right from the earliest days in the wilderness, after their escape from Egypt, the Israelites were aware of the presence of God in their midst. First, the awesome and terrifying Presence at the top of the mountain, where only Moses went, but still the people pleaded not to have to face the LORD like that again ¹.

And then, the LORD's plan to live there with his people. He gave Moses detailed instructions to build the tabernacle or 'Tent of Meeting'. In **Exodus 25 - 31**, on the mountain and at the same time as he gave Moses the tablets of stone with the commandments, the LORD specifies every little detail of this special tent. But right at the beginning of that passage, **Exodus 25:8**, he sets out his simple but awesome plan: *"Let them construct a sanctuary for me, that I may dwell among them"* ². **His purpose was to have a presence on earth among his people.**

When the tabernacle had been built, with all the details completed, it was still just an elaborate tent, until the moment when the LORD took up residence. See **Exodus 40:34-38** and **Numbers 9:15-23**. The 'sons of Israel' would not move on in their travels until the cloud and fire were 'taken up' from the tent – they couldn't have done even if they wanted to, because the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle and no-one could go in, not even Moses!

It was the same with the temple that was eventually built in Jerusalem many years later. King David had wanted to build it (**Acts 7:46** and **2 Samuel 7**) but it was Solomon who did so, as the LORD promised to David in **2 Samuel 7:13**. Again, everything was completed in glorious splendour, but it remained simply an amazing building until, once again, *'the glory of the LORD filled the house of God'* (**2 Chronicles 5:14**), so much so that the priests simply could not stand there in the temple! Then Solomon prayed and asked the LORD to make the temple like a sort of 'local headquarters' on earth, in spite of the fact that *'heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house which I have built?'* (Read **2 Chronicles 6** !). The LORD answers by once again filling the temple with his glory, and again the priests could not even enter the building (**2 Chronicles 7:1-3**). The LORD certainly made his presence felt!

Again, many years later, when ten of the twelve tribes of Israel had been taken off to Assyria (never to be heard of again) and the remaining Jewish people (the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, plus a few Levites) had been exiled to Babylon for 70 years, some Jews returned to Jerusalem and started to rebuild the temple, with encouragement from the LORD via his prophets, Haggai and Zechariah. Zechariah receives a message from the LORD : *"Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst," declares the LORD. "Many nations will join themselves to the LORD in that day and will become my people. Then I will dwell in your midst . . ."* (**Zechariah 2:10-11**) It looks like Zechariah was seeing further into the future than the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem!

Into the New Testament, and the theme continues! We may be familiar with the idea that our individual bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit ³, but Paul also writes about the Church being *'the temple of the living God'* (**2 Corinthians 6:16**) – and he is definitely NOT talking about a physical building! He expresses concern that the 'temple' there in Corinth may be in danger of serious damage if there is division, wrong foundations or wrong 'building' (**1 Corinthians 3:16,17**). More about that next time.

Perhaps one of the clearest passages is in **Ephesians 2:19-22**, where he writes: *"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."* Forgive the Greek detail, but that last word 'dwelling' is really special; it means a place to make a long-term residence, somewhere to settle down. Paul is saying that God is building the whole

¹ **Exodus 20:18-21 & Deuteronomy 5:22-27**

² See also **Exodus 29:45,46, Leviticus 26:11-12, Ezekiel 27:37**

³ **1 Corinthians 6:19**

Church worldwide AND building the believers in Ephesus into a place where he can establish his presence locally. Wow!

I believe that is exactly what the Lord still wants to do with his church in every location in these days too.

Paul, writing to Timothy, describes the local church as the 'house' or 'household' of God (**1 Timothy 3:15**) and we have seen how Peter picks up the same theme in **1 Peter 2**, saying that we are being built up as a spiritual house and linking that back to the tabernacle and temple of the Old Testament.

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So, where is all this leading? How will God's plan – to have his presence on earth – be realised? In **Revelation 21:1-3**, the apostle John sees *'the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and he will dwell among them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be among them . . ."* The bride is a picture of the Church so there, right at the climax of the age, the Church and the presence of God on earth are closely connected!

We may feel that this all seems far off and wonder how we are involved on a day-to-day level. In previous times together, we have looked at our own personal spiritual development, especially in the light of what our Father has done for us in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our own individual spiritual growth on proper foundations is vital, but it is not the ultimate goal of the gospel. It is as we are **built together in fellowship** that the Lord is able to build his Church. We need to explore this process and see how it will work out in our own lives in relationship with each other, in Christ.

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We are being built into a temple,
Fit for God's own dwelling place;
Into the house of God which is the Church,
The pillar and the ground of truth,
As precious stones that Jesus owns,
Fashioned by his wondrous grace,
And as we love and trust each other,
So the building grows and grows.

Ian Traynar, 1977

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Dave Taylor September 2024

Solid Foundations – Right Building

We started last time with Peter's dramatic statement to Jesus: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" and Jesus' often-misunderstood response that "upon this rock I will build my Church", and then looked at a little of the history of God's 'called-out-people' from Exodus to Revelation, along with the unfolding realisation that we are called out not only to be his people but, more especially, to be the 'place' which he inhabits, where he makes his residence, where his presence may be found.

Now we need to look at solid foundations and, as we do that, we shall look at solid foundations in our own lives as well as solid foundations for the Church. Not surprising, really – the foundations that are in our own lives actually **are** the foundations for the Church!

The Church doesn't somehow have a separate existence on its own, which we need to 'join'. The Church **is** God's 'called-out-people', you and me, and all our brothers and sisters around the whole world. If our lives have been joined to Jesus, it is because we have heard his call and responded to it – and so, as a result, we are automatically in his Church.

Peter's response to Jesus' question had three components:

- 1) Peter had received revelation from "my Father who is in the heavens".
- 2) He had believed what he had been shown.
- 3) He spoke it out!

All of these components were needed to form the foundation in his life, and they remain essential for us today. I believe this three-fold response is the actual 'rock' on which Jesus promises to build his Church.¹

Paul describes the process in **Romans 10:8-10** : *"But what does it say? 'THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART' – that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, because if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."* Are we a little surprised by that? We usually think of our salvation being a result of faith and faith alone, don't we?

One of the earliest Bible verses that I learned was **Ephesians 2:8** : *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."* If we are in Christ, at some point in our lives we have received 'revelation' which has enabled us to respond in faith. For you, it may have been very mundane and down-to-earth, or perhaps it was more dramatic – it doesn't matter! Either way, we began to see what God has done for us in Jesus. And then our response of faith was vital. Without it we would not be prepared – or even able – to truthfully say 'Jesus is my Lord'. But that same real faith has the result of making us ready to make the declaration. Experience shows that making this declaration has an effect on us as well: it seems to 'cement' our commitment. To me, it seems similar to a marriage ceremony. The ceremony does not create the loving relationship, but it does have the effect of 'firming it up'. Each partner is willing to publicly declare their love and commitment to the other. Without the declaration, the relationship may feel rather less certain. I referred to the **Romans 10** passage last week when we were about to take the bread and wine, and I believe that sharing in the Lord's Supper is another way in which we make that vital public declaration.

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But there is an even more fundamental foundation than our threefold response to revelation – the Lord Jesus Christ himself! Last week, we looked at **1 Peter 2:4-10** and other verses and saw how we are being built together into a spiritual house in which God wants his amazing presence to be

¹ If you want to explore the different words that Jesus used for 'Peter' and 'rock' in this passage, plus some more Biblical references to rock and stone, see See 'Bedrock' from www.justonecandle.uk

resident, just as it was in the Old Testament tabernacle and Temple, constructed by Moses and Solomon.

Peter takes passages from the Old Testament ¹ to show that Jesus is the “*choice stone, a precious corner stone*” which God laid ‘in Zion’ (i.e. among his people) but also shows that he would be rejected by “*those who disbelieve*”. They rejected what they considered to be a very ordinary ‘stone’, but he turned out to be the vital cornerstone (literally, ‘the head of the corner’) of the whole building! A (small) stone to trip over and stumble but, even more fundamentally, a rock (literally ‘bedrock’) of offence. Tragically, this is the way that the vast majority of Jewish people view their Messiah, and Peter is writing this letter mainly to believing Jews. In the following verses (9-10) he re-affirms to these Jews who have accepted their Messiah that they are now the heirs of the promises made by God in the Old Testament.

In **Ephesians 2:19-22** (another passage we looked at last week), Paul also refers to the Lord Jesus as the cornerstone of the whole ‘building’ of the Church, but mentions that we/they are “*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets . . .*” What does he mean? Some people have interpreted this to mean that we need present-day ‘apostles’ and that they, in themselves, should form part of the foundation of the Church locally and internationally. I believe this is dangerous and misleading. There have been too many people who have styled themselves as ‘apostles’, often initially with very good biblical teaching, but who have then wandered off into danger areas which they called ‘authority and submission’ which have drawn sincere believers away into situations in which there is control and manipulation, with a denial of the freedom to hear God’s voice for themselves. We escaped a situation like that about 40 years ago, but it seems that they may still exist. BEWARE !

We can find several links between apostles and foundations in the New Testament, but in **1 Corinthians 3:10-15**, Paul makes it clear that he **laid** a foundation there in Corinth, not that he considered himself to **be** part of that foundation!

You will remember that the believers in Corinth had started splitting into loyalty groups according to the apostle or teacher which each of them appreciated the most:– ‘Paul’s groups’, ‘Apollon’s group’, ‘Peter’s group’ and even a super-spiritual group who seemed to think that they were the only ones who were in ‘Christ’s group’.

The foundation which Paul had laid some time before was simple: “*no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ*” (v.11). But he was worried about what some people might be trying to build on that foundation, and warns “*each man must be careful how he builds on it*” (v.10).

First of all, that foundation! There is only one, which means that any ‘building’ which is based on anything other than the Lord Jesus Christ himself cannot be the Church, or part of it. Each one of the ‘living stones’ that Peter wrote about has a personal relationship with him, and is at least beginning to be ‘built into’ him as part of that ‘spiritual house’. It is simply not possible for someone to be part of the Church without that living connection to Jesus.

It is very tempting to try to include people in the hope that they will, sooner or later, come to faith in Jesus. This is a difficult point. Of course we want to befriend people and introduce them to the new life that we have begun to experience for ourselves, but we do them no favours if we let them think that they can be in some way already in the Church before they have come through that same 3-fold response which Peter made:–

First, seeing, or at least beginning to see, that the answer to their need is in Jesus.
Then, believing what they have begun to realise and putting their trust in Jesus.
Speaking out, or in some other way publicly acknowledging Jesus as Lord.

¹ **Isaiah 28:16** (also quoted by Paul: **Romans 9:32-33 & 10:11**), **Psalms 118:22** (quoted by Jesus: **Matthew 21:42 & Luke 20:17**).

Inevitably, we find this issue difficult and it is made no easier by popular ideas of what the Church is. Probably all of us have grown up with some of these ideas and it is hard to shake them off in favour of gaining a clearer, Bible-based understanding. Hopefully these studies will help us to discover more.

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Paul does not stop at just looking at the foundation; he looks at what may be built on it. Don't forget, in this passage he is looking at the tragic splitting up of the church in Corinth into 'loyalty groups', so most of these comments will be intended to try to bring them back into line, seeing **one** 'building' on **one** foundation.

He takes the long view – a very long view! First of all, he lists six types of building material which might be used in constructing a house: gold, silver, costly (or 'precious') stones, wood, hay and straw (**v.12**). Then he says that 'the day' is coming, when the nature of any person's work will be revealed, and fire is the way that it will be revealed. He is looking forward to a time when his own work and the work of others will be tested and shown to be what it really is in God's eyes – serious and scary!

For anyone who seeks to serve the Lord, there is an awesome prospect here. However successful our work may **appear** to be, fire will reveal what it is really made of. The situation there in Corinth is that Paul's own work there as an apostle is 'on the line', and so is the work of anyone else who is looking to build on the foundation Paul laid. He is not specific, but I think he is including anyone there in Corinth who sees themselves as some sort of 'builder', contributing to the growth of the church there.

We all know that three of these materials burn really well but the other three don't. How can we tell what material we are building with? How can we know whether our work will survive the judgment of fire? These materials have another quality apart from flammability . . .

Straw is fairly quick to produce and cheap, because basically it is a by-product of growing grain. Hay is also quite a quick crop, but it is a crop in its own right, valuable and needing more care and attention to get a satisfactory result. Wood takes much longer; more care, more waiting! But all of these are things that we can produce ourselves, given some time and effort.

Gold, silver and costly stones cannot be 'produced' in the same way. They are part of the creation and need to be **found**, then mined and made suitable for use, in buildings or anywhere else. They are things that God has created but has made available to the human race to discover and bring into use.

Does this give us a clue to what Paul means here? If we seek to contribute to the growth of the Church, then we need to use 'materials' which our Father has generated, not some scheme of our own which may look good and perhaps give quick results. If the 'materials' we use in building are not those which he has made and provided then, in the end, on 'the day', they will disappear to ashes from the judgment of fire.

He is not only concerned about the judgment of fire on 'the day'. There is a much more immediate danger that he can see there in Corinth. It seems that some of what was going on was actually threatening to damage the church, which he describes as the 'temple of God' – where God's presence dwells. The word translated as 'destroy' means 'spoil', 'ruin', 'corrupt' or 'destroy' (**v.17**) and Paul uses it to describe both the damage caused to the church and God's judgment on the one causing the damage!

Back in **v.15**, there is at least some consolation for the person who has worked hard but with man-made materials: their work will go up in smoke, but they at least will be saved personally, 'yet so as through fire'. Nothing so certain for the one who causes damage to the earthly dwelling place of God – his Church!

Please don't step back from these two aspects and think 'Well, that's just for those who are involved in Christian work, leaders and speakers, organisers and workers. That's not me; I'm just an ordinary believer.' Obviously, it does apply especially to those involved in ministry of any sort, but we are all involved to at least some degree.

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We need to heed the warnings but, on a much more positive note, let's look at how growth and 'building up' in the local church works when everything is functioning as it is designed to. And, in passing, it is worth recognising that **the Lord has designed his Church to grow** continuously and be built up, not to be static but to be always moving forward.

In **Ephesians 4:11-16**, Paul describes the process. It's worth noting that this passage is NOT suggesting that the people involved in this process are in some way perfect, but rather that this is a process that moves them (us!) forwards individually at the same time as seeing the Church built up together.

"And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for (literally, 'into') the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

So there **we all** are! The apostles and prophets are there, putting in foundations, along with evangelists, pastors and teachers, and their responsibility is to contribute to equip the 'saints' (that's us) into the work of service. The aim is maturity, 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ'. Wow!

But see how it works: The whole body (worldwide or local) is 'fitted and held together by what every joint supplies' (literally 'through every joint of the supply') and depends on each individual part working properly (literally 'working in measure'). Result: the body grows and is built up in love. God's design in action!

Paul did not write this to the folks in Ephesus as some sort of theoretical letter. All of this was intensely practical for them, and they will have needed to see and receive what he wrote to them and work through it in their lives together as they discovered more of what it meant to be 'a dwelling of God in the Spirit' (**Ephesians 2:21-22**).

By the grace of God, we can learn to do the same.

Dave Taylor September 2024

Built Together – Why?

Over the last few years, we have looked together at many different aspects of our life as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. At the basis of it all is our own individual relationship with God, our own personal rescue from a life lived ‘having no hope and without God in the world’, a life of failure and disobedience.

It is all too easy to think that that may be all that the Good News of Jesus is about – rescue from the power of sin and failure and coming into a real working relationship with the living God. In one sense, that is true, but we have been exploring together more of what that working relationship leads into: – how it affects our lives in so many different ways, how we can begin to be changed from the inside as the Holy Spirit works in us, how we can take hold of what our Father has given us in Christ, and even how we can begin to know God himself – an awesome prospect!

But what is it all for? Why does God bother with all this deep, personal and sometime painfully detailed work with us? Has he got a strong overriding motive? Yes, we know the answer! It is his own amazing love for every member of the human race: *“For God loved the world in this way, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”* (**John 3:16**)

But again we need to ask the question: **WHY?** What is his purpose in loving us like that? We have been beginning to look at the answer to that question. He does not want just a collection of individuals in right relationship with him. That is a vital foundation, but he wants more than that; he wants those individuals to bond together ‘as precious stones that Jesus owns’ and be built into a spiritual ‘house’ where the presence of God dwells. We’re not talking about a building of bricks and mortar. I think we know that.

For that building to take place, it is vital that each one of us has the necessary personal foundations in place. Not that any of us will be perfect in this life, but that we are learning to live where our Father has placed us – in his Son. If you want to see growth in the Church, please do not give in to the temptation to ‘fudge’ this. I have been around long enough and seen enough attempted (but failed) growth to know that it doesn’t work without the foundations.¹

We have looked together at different aspects of those foundations, especially as they relate to our own **individual** lives, and inevitably we have been drawn towards **the purposes of God** as he works in our lives. ‘Why does he bother with me?’ ‘What is this all about?’ ‘Where is it all going?’

As far as I can see, the answer to those questions can be summed up in two words: **Church** and **Kingdom**. In the last couple of times together, we have begun to look more at the Church and seen 1) how we are ‘called out’ and designed to be a dwelling place for God and 2) the need for right foundations and proper building methods and materials.

But again the question, **why?** Is the Church God’s ultimate purpose? Or does he have an even greater agenda? Can we possibly be part of it? I believe that the answer to that question has been before us in plain sight, but – somehow – we have usually missed it! And here in **Luke 19**, Jesus gives us a beautifully simple insight into it!

In this chapter, we see Jesus meeting with a nasty little rich man whose life was transformed – Zacchaeus! We may have known the story for years: Jesus calls him down from a tree and then goes to his house for a meal and probably to stay the night. But we may have missed the ‘after-dinner parable’ which he told there, maybe because it is very like the ‘parable of the talents’ which we find in **Matthew 25**. But this one (**Luke 19:11-27**) is different in a number of ways. Jesus told it in Jericho, when he was still on his way to Jerusalem. He told ‘the talents’ in Jerusalem. I’ll leave you to do the full comparison yourself . . .

Yes, Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, and there was an ever-growing sense of expectation. Later in this same chapter, we read of him riding into the city, surrounded by his jubilant crowd of

¹ **1 Corinthians 3:10-17**. Also *The Christ-Life for the Self-Life* by F B Meyer and *By His Doing*. Both from www.justonecandle.uk

disciples. They were definitely expecting something exciting to happen, calling him 'King' and quoting from the Psalms. They seemed certain what was happening: *"they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately"* (v.11). Several weeks later, when the Kingdom of God had NOT arrived as soon as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the question came back into their minds: *"Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"* (Acts 1:6). The question was 'When?' It was never 'Where?'

For years, we may have accepted the common idea that 'the disciples had got it all wrong; Jesus wasn't going to set up his Kingdom on the earth'. Yes, they **had** got it wrong, but not in that way. He didn't tell them that the Kingdom would not be on earth, just that it was not going to happen immediately.

'No,' says Jesus, 'it's not yet, and I'll tell you a parable to illustrate it' – and gave us all the parable of the minas.¹ From our familiarity with the parable of the talents, we may think that the lesson here is exactly the same, to make the best use of the abilities that we have. (Even the word 'talent', which was originally the word for an enormous sum of money, has passed into English with a completely different meaning!)

But there is a very clear direction here. We're not often told **why** Jesus told each parable (I can't think of another example), but Luke tells us here *"because he was near Jerusalem, and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately."* (v.11) I am impressed: Luke wasn't there, so he must have found this out in his research into Jesus' life and ministry. Whoever told him about this episode remembered **why Jesus told the parable!**

It's not difficult to work out who the characters in this story represent. There is a nobleman who is about to go to a distant country to be awarded kingship of a realm which includes where he is currently based, and his citizens (the local residents) reject him and definitely do not want him to be their king. He leaves ten of his slaves to carry on his business while he is away and gives them some cash to do business² with until he comes back. He receives the kingdom, comes back to his 'home base' after some time and checks up on the slaves to see how they have got on. The ones who have done well are not just congratulated, they become governors of cities in the kingdom which the nobleman has received. Remember, these are not paid servants; they are slaves who are **owned** by their master. They suddenly become local rulers under their boss, who has now become king!

At the time that Jesus told this parable, he was only a few days away from his death and resurrection, and had just another six weeks with the disciples before he 'went to a distant country', taken up into the clouds before their eyes. He told them to wait in the city for 'the promise of my Father' which would come upon them and they would be *"clothed with power from on high"* (Luke 24:45-53 & Acts 1:4-11). And then there was the promise that he would come back *"in just the same way as you have watched him go into the sky"*, given by the 'two men in white clothing' and confirming what he had already taught about his **future** return and the coming of the 'kingdom of the heavens'.³

The 'nobleman' in the parable is Jesus, having received his kingdom and due to return to his household in his 'home base' (this world) to see how his slaves (his disciples, the Church, we his followers) have got on with his 'business' during his absence. The nobleman's citizens who did not want him to rule over them are those who reject him – the majority of Jews at that time and all who have rejected his rule ever since.

Can you see the simple parallels in this story? This is a parable about the coming of the Kingdom of God – and our involvement with it! I like Matthew's phrase 'the kingdom of the heavens' – God ruling on the earth, just as he does in all the rest of creation!⁴

¹ A mina was a lot of money (about 100 days' wages), but nothing like as much as a talent (about 15 years' wages!)

² I like the Greek work here *'pragmateuomai'* – same origins as our word 'pragmatic'. They needed to **do something** with the cash!

³ See **Matthew 24:1-51, Mark 13, Luke 21:5-36.**

⁴ See [Revolution on Earth](#), a series of simple studies on the Kingdom of God, from

So, his return will be a time of reckoning for those in his 'household' – how faithful will we have been with what he has committed to us? How much will we have learned to equip us to be useful in his coming kingdom? Will he be able to entrust us with further responsibilities? Perhaps we can begin to see how important and relevant it is for us to develop as individual believers, and also to learn how to function together in his 'household', preparing for his return and the manifestation of his Kingdom on this earth.

I am not going to try to guess at what 'the kingdom of the heavens' will be like when *"the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ"*,¹ nor what sort of responsibilities he may give us, but this parable gives us a big clue: Becoming the governor of several cities is VERY different from handling your boss's business: the 'training' we have **now** is different from our future responsibilities!

This also follows up some very clear prophecies in **Daniel 7**, which refer to *"one like a Son of Man"* who will come *"with the clouds of heaven"* and be *"given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve him"* (**v.13-14**). And there is more that relates directly to us! **Daniel 7:18** says *"But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever, for all ages to come"* and **v.27** says *"Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; his kingdom an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey him."* Wow!

Just a small but significant point. In case we might be tempted to think that this is some sort of picture of 'heaven', the prophecy very clearly states that this will take place *'under the whole heaven'*. This really is the coming kingdom of God on this earth, which Jesus taught so much about, and which underlies so much of what was written by John, Paul and Peter. Perhaps one of the most eloquent passages is **Romans 8:18-25**, which we have looked at before. But it is good to be reminded, so please do read it again!

This all may seem very different from what we have become used to. Hopefully we have left behind any ideas of simply 'going to church and trying to live a good life' and have found real new life through personal trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and what he did for us – once and for all – through his death, burial, resurrection and return to 'the right hand of the Father'. If that is not yet your experience, please do not wait to actively take hold of the new life which can be yours today – and for eternity!²

But, if we **have** taken hold of that new life, have we seen that all our vital and ongoing spiritual development – both individually and together in fellowship – is also preparation for our long-term future in the coming kingdom of God, just as the nobleman's slaves were being trained for their future roles in his kingdom? They would not have even guessed at the possibility, but it was coming, none the less. Their boss knew what he was doing!

Of course, the work which the slaves did while their boss was away was not **only** training and preparation for the future kingdom. It had value there and then, for his business to prosper in the meanwhile, and it is the same for us. How we live and **learn** to live **now** is certainly not irrelevant. We want to see our boss's 'business' flourish here and now – life in the fellowship of the Church, the 'body of Christ'. What we know (and the slaves didn't) is that it is also a vital part of our preparation for the full manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens.

We **are** being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Perhaps now we can see a little more clearly WHY. Next, we need to start to look into a little of the 'HOW' . . .

Dave Taylor November 2024

Built Together – How?

We have begun to see how an important part of God's purpose in our lives is to **build us together** in fellowship in the Church – a 'household' of those who share in the new life that comes from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and a 'house' in which God himself can make his home.

Last time, we had a look at the 'big picture' – how the way the Lord is working in our individual lives fits into how he is working in the Church, and how the way he is working in the Church here and now is both valuable for the present day **and** also training us for future responsibilities when he returns to this earth to reign.

So, the next question is obvious: **HOW** is he doing that ? Let's look at some important basics . . .

After Peter had made his momentous declaration, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*",¹ Jesus talked about 'my Church' and said that **HE** would build it, and he used an ordinary word that means 'to build a house'. Paul uses that same word, and others linked to it, not only to describe his own involvement in seeing the Church built, but also the way that **each member of the Church** is included in the building process! We'll look at that again in a minute.

We need to remember again that Jesus and Paul, when they speak about the Church, are speaking about those who have responded to the call of God and are in a real working relationship with him through their ongoing trust in the Lord Jesus and what he has done for them. They are not talking about people who have simply joined an organisation that may call itself a church. This building process is for those who are 'living stones' – those who have responded and have come to Jesus – and are being built up together as a spiritual house (**1 Peter 2:4-8**).

If you are **not** a 'living stone', it is **impossible** for you to be built into the Church. But, if you **are** a 'living stone', then you are not only **part of the house** but you are also **part of the building process**, however large, small, young or old you may be, and even if you feel insignificant, weak and ineffective.

OK, then, so how do we get involved in this building process? If you are joined to Jesus, then you already started being involved as soon as you started your new life in him! How?

On the Receiving End

We have looked at this before, but it's worth repeating. How did we first come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? We each have our own personal history, and probably no two experiences are the same, but there is a common factor for each one of us: a '**light-bulb moment**', a time when we began to say 'I see!' It may have actually been a brief moment, but it might equally have been a gradual process over time. Long or short, we came out of it with fresh appreciation of the reality of what God had done for us in Jesus, and our 'walk' with him began.

After that initial experience, most of us probably got involved in some form of 'Christian activity', maybe learning to pray, reading the Bible or going to meetings. Did these things help us to grow in our faith? Hopefully they did, but if they didn't do as much as we thought or expected, that may have made us feel a little discouraged or even disillusioned – until we receive another shaft of light which enables us to say 'I see!' again.

I believe that this is the essence of spiritual growth, and that the chief reason why we **do** benefit from our various activities is that they are often channels for this same process of real revelation – even in ways that may seem to be small and insignificant. And then we 'firm up' on what has just become real to us by speaking it out, perhaps just sharing what we have 'discovered' with another brother or sister. Paul describes this process in **Romans 10:8-13**.

You may be able to point to specific times in your life when this sort of fresh appreciation dawned on you quite suddenly and your life changed as a result. Or you may not! But, either way, you are

¹ **Matthew 16:13-20**

able to say 'I see' about an ever-growing number of realities which the Lord has brought to you. You are growing!

These light-bulb moments can come when we are on our own, but they may often arrive when we are meeting with other believers. Something that someone says, a line from a song or some words from a Bible reading – something triggers fresh appreciation and we begin to see things differently. The Holy Spirit has been able to bring us forward by another step. Small, maybe, but moving forwards!

I have been careful to say 'appreciation' and not 'knowledge'. It is not always understanding of truth or factual information, though for me it often seems to be. Not everybody works in the same way! But when God speaks to us, the result is always **light**, in whatever way that works out in our lives. And it is light that enables us to move forward in our trusting relationship with him. *"The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple."* (**Psalm 119:130**)

It doesn't always feel so positive! Sometimes we need to be told things that we don't like to hear. Perhaps we have said or done something that has hurt someone else, whether by accident or on purpose, and either that person or another caring brother or sister has come to us to try to put things right, to encourage us to admit our fault and heal the broken relationship. It may not seem like 'revelation' in the same way, but the key point is when we realise what we have done and say 'Oh, I see!' Jesus describes the difficult process in **Matthew 18:15** onwards, and John describes it as learning to 'walk in the light' (**1 John 1:5-10**).

. . . and giving out as well as taking in . . .

We may have become so accustomed to receiving that we forget that each of us (yes, every single one who belongs to Jesus) has something to give 'into the mix', at least a small contribution that will help someone else to receive, perhaps just a simple word which will contribute to a 'light bulb moment' for them.

. . . which is where we come to **Ephesians 4:7-16**. At first glance, this looks like a passage where Paul is writing about all the people with 'special ministries':— apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, and how effective they are in the Church. But read on! Their effectiveness is shown by the effectiveness of the saints – that's us! – as we are equipped for the work of service which **builds up the body of Christ (v.12)** until all of us become mature with a true knowledge of Jesus, even *'to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' (v.13)*. Wow!

The results of this 'building up' are shown in **v.14-16**:—

1) We will no longer be like children (the word means infants who have not yet learned to talk!) and so will not be tossed around and susceptible to 'every wind of teaching', not tricked by man-made ideas and not manipulated by crafty and deceptive schemes (**v.14**).

2) Being totally truthful and genuine with each other, we shall *'grow up in all things into him who is the head, Christ' (v.15)*. The word actually means 'truthing' – reality running through all that we do and are!

3) It's from him that all this growth comes. The whole 'body' is *'fitted and held together through every joint of the supply, according to the proper working (literally, 'working in measure') of each individual part'* and it is **the body itself** that *'causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love' (v.16)*.

Have you noticed? It is not the job of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to do all this building up! Their job is to equip us so that the growth of the 'body' flows through the 'body' itself.

Are we functioning as 'joints of the supply'? Is every part working properly, in the measure for which it is designed? If so, then **growth will be the result** as we share together. This is not just personal growth now, it is growth of the 'body', Christians who are joined together in fellowship.

Remember that word that Jesus used when he said 'I will **build** my Church' –? It's a word that means 'to build a house', and we have already looked at the fact that we have been called out and called together to be a 'house' or a 'temple' in which God makes his home. Paul uses this word again here in **v.12 & 16**, when he is writing about the building up of the church as the 'body' of Christ. Two powerful pictures of the Church: **a house where God's presence is found** and **a living body through which his life is expressed**. In both cases, very much in the real world, here and now!¹

Paul uses the same word again, and often, in **1 Corinthians 14**, where he is writing about meetings of the church in Corinth and the use of spiritual gifts in those meetings. For example, in **v.26**, he writes *"let everything be done for **edification**."* It's the same word, 'building the house'! Every single thing that takes place in their meeting, says Paul, needs to be focused on that single objective, to see the Church – the 'body' of Christ there in Corinth – built up and growing healthily.

In that same verse, he writes *"When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation . . ."* He clearly expected that the 'body' there would grow *"according to the working in measure of each individual part"*, just as he wrote to Ephesus!

This is not just about having good, effective and uplifting meetings, though obviously Paul longs to see that happening in Corinth, in Ephesus and in every place where Christians meet together . . .

As we saw last time in **Luke 19** and the parable of the minas, right now we are in a time of preparation, a time of training, for our future roles in the Kingdom of God when Jesus returns to this earth to reign. This is not some fairy tale, it will actually happen, and we shall be in the same position as the slaves in that parable – needing to give account to our 'boss' of how we have used the resources which he has entrusted to us. And receiving fresh responsibilities in his Kingdom, based on how we have used those resources!

In the light of this, as we look at our own personal spiritual growth and the growth of the Church together in fellowship, does it all begin to snap into a sharper focus?

Can we see that it is vital that we grow together in fellowship, **as those who belong to Jesus** and not simply as those who come to the same place every Sunday morning?

Can we find opportunities for this 'building up' process to increase? An informal home group meeting is often good place to start to share things that you feel the Lord may have shown you and which may be helpful to others in the group. And, of course, to be on the 'receiving end' of other people sharing. Things shared in the 'safety' of a small group like this may develop into things to be shared with the whole fellowship, for everyone's benefit.

Can we see that our own growth is **essential** to enable us to be a properly working part of the 'body' of Christ and contribute to that growth?

Do we need to look again at the foundations in our own lives and make sure that we are learning to live lives that are based on the fact that our Father has placed us **in Christ** –? ²

Vital foundations for real spiritual growth in our own lives, for the growing life of the Church – and for the coming kingdom!

Dave Taylor December 2024

¹ For a more detailed study of this word, see [Building the House](http://www.justonecandle.uk) from www.justonecandle.uk

² For a series of studies on what it means to be 'In Christ', see ['By His Doing'](http://www.justonecandle.uk) from www.justonecandle.uk (Talks given at Okehampton Baptist Church, October 2018 to January 2020 – notes and some recordings.)

Further copies can be downloaded from www.justonecandle.uk,
together with recordings of the first three talks, and
Designed To Grow which is a booklet which explores these topics more fully.

