

Ephesians 2:19-22
The Dearest place on earth!

Scripture reading:

Ephesians 2:19–22 (ESV) — **19** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, **21** in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. **22** In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Prayer for illumination: please join me in prayer...

Introduction:

This mad lib by Kevin Deyoung describes the sentiment of many....

“The institutional church is so (pejorative adjective). When I go to church I feel completely (negative emotion). The leadership is totally (adjective you would use to describe Richard Nixon) and the people are (Noun that starts with un-). The services are (adjective you might use to describe going to the dentist), the music is (adjective you would use to describe the singing on Barney), and the whole congregation is (Choose among: “passive,” “comatose,” “hypocritical,” or “Rush Limbaugh Republicans”). The whole thing makes me (Medical term).” (Deyoung, 14)

Sadly, some of you have had bad experiences with the church, making you very leery of getting too involved in the church. When you hear the word church, you groan. Trust me, I get it...

In light of that, the glowing description of the church of Jesus Christ in Ephesians 2:19-22 might surprise you. Let me provide some context.

Last week we learned in Ephesians 2:14-18 that Jesus Christ has destroyed the hostility between Jews and Gentiles creating one new body. This new body is the church of Jesus Christ. This week’s passage (Eph. 2:19-22) describes the nature of the church.

This description of the church in Ephesians 2:19-22 is designed to encourage the gentile Christians in Ephesus. *It reminds them, and reminds us, that if we are part of the church of Jesus Christ, we are the temple of the living God.*

Notice, we don’t go to the temple, and we are not in the temple; we are the temple.

The temple metaphor was particularly relevant to the gentiles in Ephesus. Remember, that they were not allowed in the physical temple in Jerusalem. This privilege was only given to the Jews. But Jesus has destroyed the dividing wall of hostility in the temple (Ephesians 2:14). Now Jews and Gentiles worship in the same temple.

This helps us understand the words of 2:19-20...

Ephesians 2:19–20 (ESV) — **19** So then you (gentiles) are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints (Christian Jews) and members of the household of God (the family of God), **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

Most of us are gentiles, yet as members of the church of Jesus Christ, we too are the temple of the living God.

This morning, we will look at four aspects of the temple from Ephesians 2:20-22

The temple's foundation

The temple's cornerstone

The temple's walls

The temple's occupant

First, the temple's foundation

Ephesians 2:19–20 (ESV) — 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

Here, Paul argues that the spiritual temple, known as the church, is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

“The word order (apostles first, prophets second) suggests that Paul means New Testament apostles and prophets, the prophets being those to whom and through whom the Word of God was proclaimed.” (Hughes)

What did the apostles and prophets have in common? They were both called to edify the people of God with the word of God. Eventually, their writings and teachings became the NT Scriptures.

This means that the foundation of the church is not a person or an office. The foundation of the church is the doctrinal truths of the NT scriptures.

Application:

If we mess with these doctrinal foundations the church will crumble.

If we deny the NT's teaching on the virgin birth or the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the church will crumble.

If we deny the NT's teaching on the exclusivity of Jesus Christ...

If we deny the reality of heaven and hell...

If we deny the trinity...

If we deny justification by faith alone...

If we deny the doctrine of penal substitution....

If we deny the NT's teaching on gender and sexuality...

It does not matter how nice, kind, and accepting the church is, if the church tampers with the clear teaching of the NT, the church's foundation will crumble.

But there is more to the foundation than the apostles and prophets. This brings us to the second point.

First, *the temple's foundation...*

Second, the temple's cornerstone

Ephesians 2:20 (ESV) — 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

What was a cornerstone? The cornerstone was the most important part of the temple's foundation. This massive stone bore much of the weight of the building and tied all the walls and the foundation firmly together.

Show images

“In the early 1990s, archaeologists discovered five enormous stones that helped form the foundation of the Jerusalem temple. The largest stone measures 55 ft. long, 11 ft. high, 14 ft. wide and is estimated to weigh 570 tons.” (Arnold) Archaeologists believe that this was the largest object ever lifted without the aid of modern machinery.

Jesus Christ is the cornerstone and the apostles and prophets are the foundation. Practically speaking this means that Jesus Christ is the ultimate foundation for the NT church. He is the cornerstone that provides stability for the rest of the foundation and overall structure. The rest of the foundation is the teaching of the apostles and prophets found in the NT, that clearly point us to Jesus Christ. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and all of the implications are the sum and substance of the NT.

If a structure's foundation is unstable the results can be catastrophic.

Illustration:

If you have driven through Bellevue Washington recently you have probably noticed the presence of several construction cranes.

In the fall of 2006, a 210-foot construction crane was erected to build a 20-story building. In November of that same year the crane collapsed. As it fell to the ground it damaged three nearby buildings and killed a Microsoft attorney in his apartment.

The department of Labor and industries stepped in to figure out what caused the crane to collapse. At first, they speculated that high winds, ice, or operator error were responsible for the crane's collapse. Upon further investigation these causes were ruled out.

So, what caused the crane to collapse? A bad foundation!

Most cranes are bolted to a concrete foundation, buried deep in the ground. This crane was secured to four steel beams above the ground in a parking garage with no concrete foundation.

When structures are built on bad foundations the results are disastrous.

Application:

If a local church fails to build on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ, the results will be disastrous.

I have seen churches built on many other cornerstones...

The cornerstone of a charismatic pastor

Doctrinal precision

Spiritual gifts and experiences

A political cause

End times and prophecy

Racial reconciliation

Small groups... discipleship groups... women's ministry...

A schooling preference, courtship, or family integrated worship...

Building on any other cornerstone but Jesus Christ will be deadly!!!

It may seem easy to continue to build on this foundation, but church history has proven that it is exceedingly difficult. While studying a Christian denomination one scholar famously said...

The first generation taught the gospel.

The second generation assumed the gospel.

The third generation lost the gospel.

How do we know if the gospel is the cornerstone of a church? It is the thing the people of the church are the most excited about!!!

DA Carson writes,

“If I have learned anything in 35 or 40 years of teaching, it is that students don’t learn everything I teach them. What they learn is what I am excited about, the kinds of things I emphasize again and again and again and again. That had better be the gospel.” (DA Carson)

There is more to a temple than a cornerstone and a foundation. This brings us to the third point...

The temple's foundation

The temple's cornerstone

Third, the temple's walls

Ephesians 2:19–22 (ESV) — 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

Paul argues that Christians are the individual stones in the temple walls. The walls are being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

We see the same thing in 1 Peter 2:4-5.

1 Peter 2:4–5 (ESV) — 4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

The walls in the new covenant temple are composed of stones. Each stone represents a Christian.

This is an incredibly powerful picture of the inescapably corporate nature of Christianity. If Christianity was just you and Christ, there would be no temple/church. There would be no walls. Each stone depends not only on the cornerstone, but it also depends on the other stones. Without other stones, you have no walls. Without walls there is no church.

Becoming a Christian automatically means you come into relationship with others. God cements you to Christ and God cements you to other believers.

Reflecting on our passage, the greatest preacher of the 19th century, Charles Spurgeon, preached these words to his congregation...

“I know there are some who say, ‘Well, I have given myself to the Lord, but I do not intend to give myself to any church.’ Now, why not? ‘Because I can be a Christian without it.’ Are you quite clear about that? You can be as good a Christian by disobedience to your Lord’s commands as by being obedient? There is a brick. What is it made for? To help build a house. It is of no use for that brick to tell you that it is just as good a brick while it is kicking about on the ground as it would be in the house. It is a good-for-nothing brick. So you rolling-stone Christians, I do not believe that you are answering your purpose. You are living contrary to the life which Christ would have you live, and you are much to blame for the injury you do.”

Application-

You were not designed to live the Christian life on your own.

When God saved you, he saved you to be a brick in the temple of the living God, also known as the church of Jesus Christ.

This implies that you need to be engaged in close relationships with the saints.

This temple metaphor is one of the reasons we believe in formal church membership. Each stone is connected to the other stones, very formally.

If you are not a member of local church, you are like a brick that is off to the side of the temple. You are not fulfilling the purposes that God has for you.

Join a church for yourself, join a church for others, join a church for the glory of the temple.

Not being formally connected to a local church, would have been unthinkable for Peter and Paul.

Here is some specific application.... consider taking the membership class in late September (explain).

If you are a member throw yourself into active service.

If you are a member get involved in a small group or a discipleship group.

The church needs you and you need the church. Remember, a lone ranger is a dead ranger.

Let me say one more thing by way of application before I move on to the next point...

According to verse 21, this temple (the church) is a growing temple. As people hear the gospel and put their faith in its message of truth (1:13), they become part of this living and dynamic spiritual temple. God incorporates them into this growing structure.

We want to see this happen. Pray with me that God would help this temple grow as we tell our friends about Jesus.

So far, we have looked at...

The temple’s foundation

The temple’s cornerstone

The temple’s walls

Fourth, the temple's occupant

Ephesians 2:21–22 (ESV) — 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

The temple that God is crafting is not empty. The church of Jesus Christ is indwelt by the very presence of God.

In one sense the Bible is the history of God dwelling among his people. God is everywhere present, but he manifests his presence in certain places throughout redemptive history.

God manifested his presence as he led his people out of Egypt with a massive pillar of fire by night and a giant cloud by day.

Then God had Moses build a giant tent, known as the tabernacle, to house his presence in the wilderness.

The Tabernacle was placed in the center of God's people, since God wanted to dwell in the midst of his people.

Next Solomon built the stone temple in Jerusalem. In an awesome display of Power God's presence descended from heaven and filled the temple.

But then God's presence left the temple during the time of Ezekiel, due to Israel's sin.

During the prophets, God promised to fill the temple once again, but this had nothing to do with a physical temple in Jerusalem.

When Jesus came, several hundred years later. He claimed that he was the temple.

John 2:19–21 (ESV) — 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21 But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

Jesus Christ was the temple. He was the very place where God met with man. In fact, he made it possible for God to meet with man. He was God in the flesh.

After the resurrection of Jesus, Jesus ascended to the father. Jesus is not physically present with us, but he manifests his presence in his church by the power of the HS.

When the church gathers to celebrate the gospel of Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ manifests his presence in the new temple by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The OT tabernacle and temple were always meant to point us to something far greater. They pointed us to the church of Jesus Christ, the spiritual temple where God's very presence dwells.

Don't get distracted by Bible teachers who are fixated on a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. This misses the point entirely. This is going backwards not forwards.

God's plan to dwell with his people was always meant to be fulfilled in the church of Jesus Christ, the true temple of the living God.

What does this mean for us practically???

Application:

The church of Jesus Christ is the only place where God promises to manifest his presence. While it is true that God indwells individuals, something unique happens when the saints gather corporately.

But what about Matt. 18... “when two or three are gathered...”

But how does God manifest his presence when the saints gather? He manifests his presence through the preached word, through the singing, and through the sacraments.

Maybe you have sensed this in the past??? This happens on a grand scale during revival.

Pray for God to manifest his presence.


Bring your non-Christians friends to be confronted by God’s presence.

Don’t miss out on Sunday morning. I know people who have cut their vacations short to be at church on the lord’s day. Our generation is different than past generations. We should ask why???


Illustration:

Pearl jam concert in Spokane... sold out in one day!!!

Vulf Peck concert (sold out Madison square garden in one day). This got me thinking... what were the largest concerts of all time.

Number 3 of all time... 1991 ACDC and Metallica “Monsters of Rock concert” played before 1.6 million people in Moscow Russia. 

Number 2 of all time... 1994 Rod Stewart Rio De Janiero, New Years Eve, a little less than 3.5 million people in attendance. 

Number 1 of all time.... 1997 Jean-Michel Jarre, Moscow Russia, Celebrating Moscow’s 850 anniversary. 3.5 Million in attendance. 

Millions and millions of people wanted to be in the presence of these rock stars. They paid lots of money, some traveled great distances, some stood in line for days. Yet, these rock stars are mere mortals who live for 80 or 90 years. They are only a handful of the billions of humans that have ever lived on a small insignificant planet in a small galaxy.

When we gather on the Lord’s day with the saints, we get to be in the presence of God almighty!!!

The church of Jesus Christ is not primarily a social club, or a place to get a pep talk, or a place to see friends. The church of Jesus Christ is the temple of the living God, the place where God manifests his very presence.

Conclusion:

Lets go back to where we started. Lots of folks don’t like the church. I get it...

But, the church is the temple of the living God.

This is the one place on planet earth where God promises to manifest his very presence.

If this is true, shouldn't we build our lives around the church???

What else matters? Nothing!!!!

Let me conclude by quoting Charles Spurgeon one more time,

“Give yourself to the Church... If I had never joined a Church till I had found one that was perfect, I would never have joined one at all! And the moment I did join it, if I had found one, I should have spoiled it, for it would not have been a perfect Church after I had become a member of it. Still, imperfect as it is, it is the dearest place on earth to us... All who have first given themselves to the Lord, should, as speedily as possible, also give themselves to the Lord's people.” (Charles Spurgeon)

The church is the dearest place on earth. Lets pray...