

The Church That Jesus Is Building.

Introductory Message - Pastor Roger Ridley
Gretna Baptist Church, Gretna, NE, January 16, 2005

For ten years after I graduated from High-school, I worked as a union laborer in building construction. I spent half that time as a labor Forman, building schools, businesses, and bridges. I found the work to be extremely satisfying. To go from nothing, to see the hole dug, the foundation laid, the frame take shape, the brick and mortar added, and to be there for the ribbon cutting ceremony when it was all completed, knowing that you had a part in it, *that was exciting*.

Our congregation is about to enter that exciting and satisfying process. Very soon, you and I, with our own hands, will take part in the construction of a church building. *It will be* one of the greatest memories of your life. Not everyone can say that they had a part in constructing their own church building that will be used to God's glory for years to come. King David, in the Old Testament, longed to build a place of worship for God. He drew up the plans, he gathered the material, he even wrote the songs to be sung in it, but David was never allowed to construct such a building. What David was not allowed to do, *you* will have the privilege of doing.

But with this privilege comes a danger. We can become so taken with our own building project that we forget about *the church that Jesus is building*. That happened in the Old Testament with the people of Israel. They got to the point where their conversation consisted of *the Temple, the Temple, the Temple*, while at the same time, they forgot about God in His Temple (Jeremiah 7:4).

That must not happen to us. Our building project *will only have value* as it fits into the plans of the church that Jesus is building. Psalm 127:1 provides this good reminder, "*Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.*" If *our building* does not fit into *His building*, then it will be of no value. And so, this year, as we embark upon our building project, to help us keep our focus where it belongs, I will be preaching on the theme: The Church That Jesus Is Building. There are ***five stages*** in the building program of our Lord that I want us to give our attention to this year: there is the preliminary work, the ground work, the frame work, the team work, and the finish work. In this message, I will briefly introduce each of them.

I. The Preliminary Work.

We begin with the preliminary work. Up in the hill country, north of the Sea of Galilee, on the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, the disciples, alone with Jesus, were *the first human beings* to ever hear of our Lord's building plan. In Matthew 16:18, He is recorded, as having said on that occasion, "*Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*"

We will look specifically at that promise in our next message, but for now, think of what Jesus was doing. He was casting a vision. He was preparing the hearts and the minds of those men, whom He would use strategically in the building of His church, for the grand

plan He had in mind.

It was kind of like that first day, when we were able to see the preliminary plan of what our building would look like. These men followed the Lord, they loved Him, they believed in Him, but they weren't really sure what He had planned for the future. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus introduced His plan.

It was not new to Him, it had been planned for since before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). Later, the apostle Paul would describe, what Jesus already knew, as *a mystery* (Ephesians 3:1-13). It was something that God knew, but kept secret, and now it had been revealed.

There was no church in the Old Testament. Don't pay attention to people when they talk like that. In the Old Testament, the only One that knew of the Church was God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. With the incarnation of Christ, and His face pointed to the cross, Jesus began to make it known. Look at Matthew 16:21...

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was *the key* preliminary work. Without it, the Church could never be built. Who Jesus was, and what Jesus did was *the rock* upon which Jesus would build His Church. Because that is true, until a person has the proper understanding of who Jesus is and what Jesus did, and place their trust in Him, they cannot be a part of His Church.

If you have never placed your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, now would be a good time to do so. When you accept Him as *the Christ*, and believe what He accomplished at *the cross*, then His blessing becomes a part of your life, and you become a part of His Church.

II. The Ground Work.

One of the more exciting days that we have awaiting us, will come in just a few weeks, with shovel in hand, the ground work for our building will begin. Traditionally, congregations make a solemn occasion of it. They gather together, they give a challenge from the Word of God, they have a word of prayer, and then they take turns breaking the ground with a shovel. Sounds exciting, doesn't it?

It is hard to imagine how exciting it must have been on the day when Jesus broke ground for His church. It happened on the day of Pentecost, and is described for us in Acts chapter 2. Look with me at Acts 2:1-12...

Although some disagree, it is quite obvious, that Jesus began His Church, on the day of Pentecost, when He sent the Holy Spirit, according to promise, to indwell the lives of people, who would become the Church of the living God (1 Timothy 3:15).

On that day, the church began in its two forms: universal and local; visible and invisible. The Church Universal is made up of all believers from the day of Pentecost until the day when Jesus comes to take the Church to be with Him (Ephesians 5:27; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

The church local is made up of baptized believers who are organized to carry out the work of Christ in a community. On the day of Pentecost, the Church Universal was born, but also the Church of Jerusalem was born (Acts 2).

From Jerusalem, the ground work of the Church began to spread. As Jesus said it would happen in Acts 1:8. In the power of the Spirit, witnesses fanned out in ever-widening circles of influence, seeing people saved, baptized, and local churches established.

Today, our lives, as Christians, are being built upon that ground work described for us in the book of Acts. What began in the lives of those born-again, Spirit-filled Jews, gathered on the day of Pentecost, representing every nation under heaven, has continued to spread until we have also become a part of it. *What an exciting building program, and Jesus has included us!*

III. The Frame Work.

You and I are not a part of the ground work, we are part of the frame work. Through the years, some gorgeous buildings have been dedicated to the glory of God. Christian men and women have been able to do some marvelous things with stone, wood, metal, and glass. Even here, in the Omaha metropolitan area, there are some interesting church buildings to look at.

But the Church that Jesus Christ is building is not made of stone, wood, metal, and glass. Instead, the material He is using is *far more precious*, so precious in fact, that He was willing to go to the cross and give His own life to purchase it. The Church that Jesus Christ is building is made of people. You and I, and so many others, make up that precious material that He paid so much for. 1 Peter 1:18-19 says this, "*Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*"

You and I were purchased, at great price, to be added to the church that Jesus is building.

Some day soon, we are going to go shopping. We will be picking out building materials. We will not want just anything under any condition. We will want the right materials, so that they can be put together in just the right way, to form a great place of worship.

That's what Jesus is doing. He is choosing us, He is shaping us, He is fitting us, and He is adding to us that we might be *a holy temple, a habitation of God*.

Look with me at Ephesians 2:19-22...

Look also at 1 Peter 2:5...

Aren't those exciting thoughts! You and I are a part of the frame work of the Church that Jesus Christ is building. We are those *living stones* that are attached to the

foundation, fitted to Him, and rising up to the glory of God.

IV. The Team Work.

Historically, in our country, congregations have built their own places of worship. They would save up their money, they would gather the materials, and they would then work together to put up the structure. Hiring architects, engineers, and general contractors who do all the work is a fairly recent development. I like the way we are going to do it. As a team, we will work together, hand in hand, to put up our place of worship. A part of us will be in it, and a part of it will be in us.

Working as a team to construct our building is a good illustration of how Jesus has planned for His building to be completed. Look with me at Ephesians 4:11-16...

The Lord Jesus Christ has gifted each one of us, and made each of us responsible participants in the building up of His Church, so that together we might effectively accomplish more, together we might be better than we could ever be on our own, and that together we can be the kind of church He intends for us to be.

This working together not only involves the responsible use of our gifts, it also involves our relating to one another in a mature fashion. Romans 12:5 says, "*So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.*"

As members one of another, the way we relate is crucial, and so throughout the New Testament we are instructed to love one another, to be kind to one another, to bear with one another, to pray for one another, to be of the same mind with one another. That is how the whole body is fitly joined together and compacted, as it mentions in Ephesians 4:16.

And so, we are *laborers together* with the Lord Jesus Christ in the Church that He is building (1 Corinthians 3:9). What a privilege!

I can't imagine not wanting to do my part in building our place of worship this year. How neat, at some point in the future, to be able to say, "*I helped to raise that wall.*" or to say, "*I put that brick in place.*" How much greater it will also be to be able to say to Jesus, "*I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.*" (John 17:4)

V. The Finish Work.

That brings us to the completion of the project. The finish work. Certainly that is going to be an exciting day for us when we are able to take our first step into our completed building this fall. But for us, the work will not yet be done. Our work will continue until the Church that Jesus is building is brought to completion. Our building will only be a temporary tool to help us do our part in His building process.

What a glorious day it will be however, when His Church is complete. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 describes it this way, "*The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall*

rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

I am looking forward to that day, aren't you?

So in the weeks and months ahead, as we are hammering nails, and painting walls, let's not forget that as exciting as it is to build our own building, it can't compare with the Church that Jesus is building, the Church that you and I, who know Him, are a part of. That's where our focus must remain. On Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, and what He is seeking to accomplish in each of our lives.