***“JUST A PILE OF BRICKS”***

Here is a couple ordinary bricks. In this state, not good for much. As a pile they are not being used for their intended purpose. They may be used as a flowerbed boarder, but again, that’s not their intended use. Not what they were made for.

This brick, if it could think, may be a little disappointed. **{Show brick}** It might think that it had a better outcome than laying in a pile or a boarder.

Perhaps it could have been a part of an impressive structure. Joined with other bricks it may have been part of a structure in the heart of a city. Or perhaps a cottage where a family would take great pride in its charming appearance. **{Show 2nd brick}**

Put this brick with others and it could really be something! However, bricks do not build all by themselves. A foundation needs to be prepared first, and then they can be laid carefully together.

In order for some of the bricks to fit together properly, they may have to be cut or a piece chipped off.

That’s exactly what Jesus does when He builds His church!

He takes a bunch of bricks that aren’t much good on their own, and He fits them together as a master builder, with Himself being the very cornerstone!

That’s what God’s word tells us! {Eph. 2:19-22}

**“ 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 upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone 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.”**

**Notice that Jesus doesn’t use bricks to build His church. He uses people. He uses us!**

Imperfect as we are. In reading Eph. And other inspired books of God’s word we soon discover that we are the transgressors and sinners that are referred to throughout.

And somehow we convince ourselves that there are reasons beyond our control that cause us to sin. Listen, sin is not airborne. A man does not come home from work and say to his wife, “I got some sin on me today!”

No, sin just sits there like that preverbal shiny object and looks at us. It’s all around tempting us to pick it up and put it into action.

But thankfully, Jesus went to the cross and took our penalty for the sins we have committed. Call it what you want, but the Lord Jesus did not come to earth to die for a mere indiscretion. As we like to reason our sins away.

He did not die for a mistake on our part. To put in the simplest terms, Jesus came to this world to die for SIN. We can’t dress it up, make light of it or call it something that it is not!

But Jesus is the Massiah who died, was buried and raised from the dead on the third day, shedding His blood for the forgiveness of our sins. And because of that, if we have come to Him in obedient faith, we are no longer strangers and foreigners to the things of God. That is what we read in Eph. 2; 19-21 a few minutes ago.

**In Jesus, in spite of our past sins, we are shaped and formed into usable blocks for His church!**

In Him we become, “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

WE ARE HIS BUILDING! We become a part of it! **{use the hands as a church}**

Any building needs a good foundation. Verse 20 of Eph. 2 says that we have, “been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” It is on their instruction, words given to them by the inspiration of God, that we have this foundation on which we, the church, the body of Christ. Are built.

This foundation is found in the very words of God of which we all hold in our hands, the bible.

We learn about the life and ministry of Jesus.

We learn from those inspired words not only that Jesus is the foundation, but the chief cornerstone. All the bricks of a building are laid according to the position of the cornerstone. Without it the building would not stand very long. It would not be square or level. The walls would meander out of place and become wavy and weak.

Deb and I recently visited Gettysburg. One of the things we did while there was to tour the city. We saw many buildings still standing after that great battle.

We even seen a couple of those buildings with cannon balls still stuck in their walls. But yet they still stand because they were built properly. All the bricks aligned according to the cornerstone and set on a firm foundation.

1 Cor. 3:10, 11 – **“** **According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid., which is Jesus the Christ.”**

We read here that the church is built on Jesus, the one whom the apostles testify. They have laid the foundation of our faith in Jesus. We must be careful to not think we can do a better job. To do so would lead to a very weak and ready to crumble structure!

It all comes back to Jesus, because as verse 20 of Eph. 2 says, He, Jesus is the cornerstone. Today the cornerstone of a structure is largely symbolic.

But the stone being described here has its roots in ancient masonry. It was the brick or stone by which the builders lined up the whole building or structure. It was often the first stone or brick laid.

Early Hebrews and Gentiles understood the importance of the cornerstone, for it determined the stability of the foundation and the overall look of the structure.

The Jerusalem Temple had huge foundation stones. The largest were 29 feet in length, about the size of a boxcar!

Just think of that. And they had no power equipment like we have today to shape and move them.

The “chief cornerstone” was the primary foundation stone at the corner of the structure. There was not one single line or angle of the building which was not determined by and adjusted to the alignment of the cornerstone.

**We have covered all this to drive home the point that the Actual foundation stone is Jesus the Christ Himself. It is He who supports and holds together both the foundation and the walls! It is Jesus, and only Jesus who gives to the structure its unity and its strength!**

How many there are who place themselves as bricks on a faulty foundation, only to discover to late after the walls fall that their lives are without stability.

It is faith in Jesus which gives the foundation needed for a life that truly satisfies.

He is the chief cornerstone, the keystone for the whole building. The church that He came to build and sustain.

Ever play Jenga? It’s a game. You start with a bunch of rectangular blocks. They are stacked in a way that makes a little tower. Then, one by one, you are supposed to remove a block from all levels of the tower. At, first, it seems like the tower can still stand, missing just a few blocks. Then it starts to lean. One by one, as the blocks are removed, the structure weakens, until, finally the loser removes the block that sends it falling over.

This structure of which you and I are a part of isn’t made to stand with blocks missing. To work the best it has to have every block in place. **We are all needed in the Lord’s church!**

Peter says in 1 Peter 2:5 – **“You also, as living stones, are being built up into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus the Christ.”**

The Lord is building a spiritual house ( called “the household of God,” and “His dwelling place”).

All of us who are in Christ are God’s building blocks. All of us are important to His church!

We are living stones. We are the material our Lord uses to build His spiritual house.

However, and this is important…

In order for this to happen, He has to chisel away and cut out those parts of us that would detract from the finished product, or that would keep us from fitting properly with the other bricks!

I have had some say to me and you may have as well, that “I’m not good enough”, or “I know that I just wouldn’t and couldn’t fit in.” “I’m different”, My personality just wouldn’t work as a Christian.”

The answer I would like to say to those excuses is “baloney.” But the best thing would be to study God’s word with them. Showing care and kindness. And let God’s word chip away at their souls till they too gladly become a brick that Jesus can use.

All of us have to understand that Jesus will chip away at those things that He determines stand in the way of fitting in.

Although Jesus is concerned with each individual brick, His overall purpose is to create a building that will bring glory to Himself and the Father. And he makes a place for every believer in that building, giving each of us responsibilities to carry on His work.

There is an old story how a loaded station wagon pulls into the only remaining campsite. Four kids leap from the wagon and begin feverishly unloading the gear and setting up a tent. The boys then rush off to gather firewood, while the girls and their mother set up the camp stove.

Nearby, a fellow camper is marveling at the scene. He says to the kids father, “That sir is some display of team work!”

The father said, “I have a system. No one goes to the bathroom until the camp is set up.”

That’s one way to get the work done.

Notice that, in this story, everyone did their part.

The Lord’s church has many different kinds of people doing different kinds of work. All working together for the good of the church.

We are God’s building materials. Verse 22 says, **“in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”**

“Being built” refers to an ongoing process. As others are being added we ourselves are growing together.

The church that Jesus is building is a continuous project. It’s an ongoing construction. The church grows by the addition of new stones, or souls called by grace, and added to it. Let’s not forget that true church growth isn’t merely numbers. The church really grows when each member, each brick is remaining loyal to Jesus!

Don’t be like the churchgoer whose preacher unexpectedly dropped by his work place. And the preacher not knowing where his work station asked someone , “Excuse me, can you tell me where brother so and so works, tell him his preacher is here to see him. {I picture Terry when I tell this story}

Preacher? As in church preacher? You mean to tell me that he actually attends church! From the way he acts around here you wouldn’t know he could even spell Jesus!

Allow us to ask this question. How do you see yourself? **Are you someone who goes to church, or are you** **someone who is the church?{**remember our little hand church.} There is a big difference!

Jesus wants others to be able to look at us and see Him. It should not be that if someone asks if we are Christians, we say yes, but our actions say, “Well it depends on the situation.”

Each of us each day have significant choices to make concerning the Lord’s church in which we live. Just as a building, we have a blueprint to follow. We find it in the bible. The bible calls us to take stock in how we fit as the bricks of a building. Are we allowing God to chip away at those areas of our lives that hinder a good fit?

**We are to build our lives on the foundation that is faith in Jesus the Christ who suffered on a cross so that we could be free of sin before God.**

When Jesus walked with the disciples near the temple in Jerusalem, the disciples commented about the massive stones that made up the temple building. Jesus told them those stones would be destroyed. And they were about 40 years later when the Romans destroyed it.

But Jesus also said that He would rebuild it in 3 days. When Jesus said that, He was talking about His body; He is the living temple! And 3 days after, though His body was destroyed, He rose victorious over death.

Now this is amazing! Our bodies are a temple for the Lord!

1 Cor. 6:19 – **Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own.”**

As living stones in His temple we should resemble and possess the characteristics of the cornerstone. It is Christ in us the hope of glory.

This building that we meet in is not holy it is made by man. Solomon understood that a stone building could not contain God, but it should direct people to more important things. Isn’t that why we the church meets here on Sundays?

It's not the building but us, it’s meeting with fellow Christians, fellow bricks as it were to strengthen and sustain the church IN us!

1 Kings 8:58 – **“May He turn our hearts to Him, to walk in all His ways and keep the commands, decrees and regulations He gave our fathers. But your hearts must be fully committed to the Lord our God, to live by His decrees and obey His commands, as at this time.”**

**In concluding our lesson this morning:**

WE are the building, the very house of GOD!

It is not made of concrete blocks, wood, or even mud, hay and straw. It is built with people who were strangers and foreigners, but are now, “members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus the Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.”

There is a term for some bricks that just didn’t pass inspection, that had some kind of imperfection, that term is, **“clinker bricks.”**

I got news for all of us, **we are clinker bricks!** We are sinners, we are imperfect people. But in and through the church of Jesus the Christ, we become living stones, forgiven stones, stones honed and chipped for a place in the structure of the Lord His church!

To those who have as yet to accept Jesus as Lord of your life we say, “Why be an unused brick in a pile that has no purpose or direction?” Why live your life as a clinker brick never realizing your true potential.

Please accept Jesus as Lord of your life and be baptized into His holy church as a forgiven part of His building not made with human hands but made from the Blood that flowed down the cross. The blood that sanctifies and sets you apart from the pile and uses you as a living stone.

LET US ALL STAND AND SING!