

Ephesians 2: 19-21; “Citizens in the City of God”, Message # 17 in a series entitled – “The Exceeding Greatness of His Power”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on March 10th, 2024, in the Morning Worship Service.

We saw in the last message, that Christ Himself, by means of His death on the cross, has become our peace. We are no longer at enmity with God, because we have received underserved grace and favor through Christ. Through Christ’s precious life, death, and resurrection, we have been reconciled to God. We have become God’s saints. We have been set apart to be and to become three things according to our text. 1st of all – We are Citizens in the City of God. 2nd – We are His Spiritual Household. And 3rd – We are a building fitted together and growing into a holy temple. May the Lord Himself impress upon us these truth so that we will have a high and reverent esteem of them, in our hearts and minds, for Christ’s Church.

1st of all – God’s saints are Citizens in the City of God.

Verse 19 says – “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints.” It is always a good place to start, when you are considering God’s Church, to understand it as a great City of people whom God has called and gathered together to meet together to worship His holy name. You should begin by considering the Universal Church and then you should move to consider individual local churches. We who believe in the Lord Jesus are citizens of a great spiritual City. The word “City” is a word picture for the all of people of God, both Old Testament and New.

Turn with me over to Psalm 48, and we will read verses 1 and 2, and draw a few lessons from it. “A Song. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah.” “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in His holy mountain.” “Beautiful in elevation, The joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.” “God is in her palaces; He is known as her refuge.” This is certainly speaking of the Old Testament city of Jerusalem, the city of David. But, as we consider it more carefully, we should understand that it certainly has a much greater and wider application to the New Testament Church. It has reference, for us, to the times of the Messiah.

It speaks of Christ’s greatness and the praise and glory which are due to Him as its Builder and Maker. It does no violence to the understanding of this Psalm to read it this way: Great is the Lord Jesus Christ, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, in His holy mountain. Believers in Christ, the Messiah who was coming in the future when this Psalm was written, would make up a part of the Universal Church which is called here “the City of the great King” in verse 2. The great King is our Lord Jesus Christ. And yes, the city of our God and of His Christ, in His holy mountain, is a City within His larger Kingdom. That is, the Kingdom of His righteous spiritual rule and reign over all earth.

Both this physical city of Jerusalem, and the Spiritual City of Christ’s Church, will become the joy of every true believer, and will become the joy of the whole earth someday. Spiritual Israel in Spiritual Zion is beautiful in spiritual elevation, just as much as Physical Israel was in physical Mt. Zion. Indeed, it is much more so. The physical city of Zion in the Old Testament is a picture of Christ’s Church in the New. Zion is beautiful because by the working of Christ’s power, His people are elevated to the position of saints so that they can become His holy people. No matter what physical nation they are from, no matter what race they belong to, no matter what country that they live in, they find joy in the presence of other believers. For all who believe in Jesus are of one spiritual body.

For, how could the Church be the joy of the whole earth unless the elect Gentiles were also to be saved and brought into this Universal Church of the people of God, over all the earth? That is what our passage is talking about. Look also with me over at Psalm 46, and verses 4 and 5. “There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God.” “God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn.” We see here that there is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God. If you think of this in simple physical terms, the river would either

be the Kidron brook, the river which ran by Jerusalem, or it could refer to the waters of Shiloah, which had different channels and branches which ran through the city of Jerusalem. These supplied water to all of the people in that city.

But I believe that by the very words themselves here, we are intended by God to go beyond the literal physical to see the literal spiritual. These words are meant to show us some thing about the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ in New Testament times. The river which makes glad the City of God is the blessed work of the Holy Spirit in supplying spiritual nourishment and strength to God's people. The Spirit gives them spiritual help, to really live the Christian life. The Holy Spirit supplies the living water of Christ to every believer, and by these living waters, we are strengthened and refreshed. Now, this is a principle of truth which applies to all believers during all of this Church age.

There is a river of grace and the Spirit's influences, whose streams shall make glad the City of God. God is in the midst of His Church and in the heart of every believer, and they shall not be moved. You, dear believer, are a fellow citizen with the saints. You are a fellow citizens with all of the saints of every age, in heaven and earth. Look over at Hebrews 12: 22-24. "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and the church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of the sprinkling that speaks better things that that of Abel."

Now when it says here that you have come to Mt. Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, is the apostle Paul speaking only of the saints in heaven? No, he cannot be speaking of them only, because it says – "You have come to Mt. Zion". So, when we realize that the Bible was not written to the Jews only, but also to us Gentiles, we must think of these things spiritually. When we first came to Christ, we came to Mt. Zion, the assembly of the Firstborn. This is the universal church on earth, first of all. We came into to the church of the living God when we first exercised faith in Jesus Christ. And we were spiritually baptized into His body. 1st Corinthians 12: 13 – "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – And we have all been made to drink into the one Spirit."

But eventually, when we die, we shall come to the heavenly Jerusalem in our spirit. We will come to an innumerable company of angels, and to the general assembly and church of the Firstborn who are not only registered in heaven, but they are now actually in heaven. And in that holy place, we will associate with all of the saints who have died and gone beforehand; the spirits of just men made perfect. When we die we will behold our Savior, our Lord Jesus, the Mediator, the One who has brought us to God, and the One whose blood availed for us. Because He is the Son of God, His blood shed on our behalf speaks better things than Abel.

2nd – God's Saints are His Household.

Verse 19b – "You Gentiles are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." We see here that God's design for individual churches is as a household with membership, a household with members in it. Keeping house with the saints of God is not something that you do in heaven, so much as it is an earthly thing. It involves our responsibilities to God in relation to others who are also saints here upon the earth. This is why all Christians should join a church. They are already members of Christ's body by spiritual baptism, if they have believed in Christ. But they need to recognize their practical responsibility is to serve God in the context of a local church.

Sometimes, even Christian people do not care for the concept of local church membership. But it should not be that hard a thing to receive when you understand it in the context of what the apostle Paul told Timothy. Turn with me over 1st Timothy 3: 14-16. "These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." So I want you to see here that it is the local church that holds up the Truth of God's word through the teaching and preaching of the word.

In this case the truth was being held up before the congregation of the church at Ephesus, by Timothy, Paul's evangelist, and the elders who they had appointed there. In Galatians 2: 9, Peter and James and John are called pillars. The pillars in a church are those who are the most steadfast in upholding the truth. The whole believing membership of the church are called the ground of the truth. That is, the truth rested with them, and upon them, in their being faithful witnesses to the truth, in word and deed. Look at Galatians chapter 6: verse 10 with me. "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." The household of faith here refers to all Christians, but especially those who you know, in the household of the local church. They are the people who you should be associating with regularly. You are to do good to them, since you are members together with them, of the same spiritual, and local, body of believers. All the members of the body of God's household are important. Turn over to 1st Corinthians 12: 18-25.

"But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased." "And if they were all one member, where would the body be?" "But now indeed there are many members, yet one body." "And eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.'" "No, much rather those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary." "And those members of the body which think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need." "But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another."

How important it is, then, that we see that God's saints are a household. Who has set the members in the body? God has. It shows His sovereign choice in the people whom He would have become members of the local church. This ought to tell us something about visitors who come into our church. We might say – Where would they fit in, to our spiritual body? Well, God knows, and He has placed them here so that we might consider what part they will play in our church. We need to see membership not only as a formal commitment, but also in terms of God's purpose being fulfilled; of that person's gift being used in relation to the whole body, and the whole body, and their gifts, in relation to that person.

3rd – God's saints are a Building, fitted together and growing into a holy Temple.

Verses 20 and 21 – "The household of God has been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord." The household of God, every individual local church which would be faithful and true to Christ, is built on the foundation of what the apostles and prophets laid in their word which became the New Testament Scriptures. Each of God's saints is fitted into that building. We are fitted together in relation to others of the saints in the local church.

We grow together into a holy temple, as we interact over our knowledge and experience of Christ, and the spiritual truths of the word of God, with each other. Turn with me over to 1st Corinthians 3: 9-17. "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building." "According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it." "But let each one take heed how he builds on it." "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

"Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is." "If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward." "If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" "If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are."

If we had taken the time to have read verses 1-8, we would find that God's fellow workers who are being talked about here are ministers of the word; Paul and Apollos and others. We need to understand that the offices of apostles, prophets, and evangelists, who were apostolic helpers, ceased at the end of the apostolic time period. God still uses all pastor-teachers, and preachers, and persons who plant and water the word of God which is sown; all of these could be included. Those whom Paul was writing to, there in the church at Corinth, they were God's field, and God's building. How does God build the local church into a holy temple? He does so by adding believers to the church, as living stones, it says in 1st Peter 2: 5.

But here in these verses, God builds, Paul says, though planting and watering. He does it by the preaching and teaching of the word by His servants, His ministers. He builds by means of their consistent godliness and faithfulness, in relation to their building with sound and wholesome doctrine. Their doctrine and teaching sets forth the truths of the gospel. The godly minister builds using all the truth of the Bible. He builds by using the gold and silver and precious stones of his inculcating doctrines and practices which will be of lasting value in the lives of the saints. It is this which will make them spiritually strong and more mature.

The truths which are gold and silver and precious stones are the Biblical and correct doctrines of God and of Christ, of preaching and teaching all that Christ has done and accomplished. These are the truths of the doctrines of grace. They are the truths of how God created man upright, but that Adam fell and plunged our whole race into sin and ruin and misery. It is the truth of how God had to send His only-begotten Son into the world, the One who was of more value than all of Mankind together, to redeem a people for His name.

How valuable a truth it is that people know that salvation is all of grace and not of themselves, it is the gift of God. How precious are the lovingkindness and patience of God, in relation to each believer's sanctification. How good it is to be a part of God's church, His building, in which He is glorified by a true worship, and the Biblical practice of holiness, which is cultivated in their midst. If any man builds upon the foundation, which is Christ, and the precious truths of His word which are able to build them up and give them an inheritance, he is building with gold. He is building with gold, as it says in Acts chapter 20, verse 32, among those who are sanctified; those who are set apart to God's working

Conversely, if a minister, or anyone else trying to preach the word, or share it regularly with others, does not build with these sound doctrines and practices, if they compromise the truth with earthly materials of wood, hay, and stubble, that part of their work will be burned up on the Day of Judgment. On that Day, a great and searching test will take place. The fire of Christ's infallible judgment will be able to discern whether that man's work was built on His foundation. His infallible gaze will be able to determine whether that man used lasting or worthless materials in building the church.

If a man has been faithful, he will receive a reward. But if he has not been faithful, those parts of his work which are affected by his unfaithfulness will be burned up. But he himself will be saved, yet it will be through fire. The principle goes farther yet. It extends to anyone who is trying to do anything to help in the building of Christ's Church, His temple. You contribute to the building of the Church, to the building up of God's saints so that they will truly grow. Your work will only be eternally established if you build upon the foundation of Christ. It will only be established if you speak the truth in love, and live it out before them, that you will truly be able help others. That is the only way that Christian character can be formed in people's lives. Good teaching and good example.

And so, we must ask ourselves in closing – Are the things that I am attempting to teach others, sound? Sound, so that they will grow up into Christ, and be true worshipers and be faithful to the Lord? Is this church that we are a part of, growing into a holy temple in the Lord? Or, am I defiling the temple of God with the wisdom of the world that I try to get others to accept? Am I more interested in inculcating worldly strategies of how people can be successful, or popular, or impressive in the things of this world which are passing away? My brethren, let us resolve to so live that we will

have a reward at the that time when we stand before the Judgment seat of Christ and give an account of ourselves.