

“Square”

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Matthew 21:33-46 • Ephesians 2:11-22

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A couple of years after Leslie and I were married we bought our first house. It certainly wasn't anything spectacular. Actually, nondescript would be a good description. It had been built in 1955 and was only about 1200 square feet. But it was in a great neighborhood, it was solid, it had a large back yard, and it was ours.

Like many houses built in the last 60 years or so, it had a brick exterior. One day we had invited some people over and were sitting on the patio talking and grilling hamburgers when one of them asks, “what’s the story with the bricks?” Of course I didn’t know what he was talking about. It turned out the bricks, which would normally have been laid in straight lines, were all crooked. None of the bricks was square. They weren’t off by much but it was just enough that from that day on I always noticed the crooked brickwork on our house.

Of course, in modern home construction the bricks are primarily decorative. The house was framed with wood and merely had brick siding. In the same way, our buildings here at the church are steel-framed, which supports the roof, and the walls are then made of blocks with a brick veneer on the outside.

But prior to our modern construction techniques, large buildings were primarily built by stacking stones up to form the walls and then the roof was built on top of the walls. In that form of construction, the first step was to lay a cornerstone.

The cornerstone, in a stone or brick building, was the most important stone because the rest of the construction depended on that one stone. In both of our Scripture readings this morning, we see Jesus referred to as a cornerstone. So let’s try to understand what that means.

I learned that there are essentially four criteria for a good cornerstone. First of all, the cornerstone had to be perfectly square. The walls of the building started lined up by the two sides of the cornerstone. If the cornerstone was not perfectly square the rest of the building would not be square. The larger the building, the more the problem is compounded. So a cornerstone must be square.

Second, the cornerstone must be set perfectly level. The level of all the other stones is determined by the cornerstone. As other stones are stacked on top of it, if the cornerstone is not level, the walls of the building will not be plumb, meaning straight vertically. Third, the cornerstone must be aligned precisely on the building site in order for the building to be aligned properly. This obviously is much more critical when building in the city, where there is little room for error.

Fourth, the cornerstone must be able to bear the weight of the building that it supports. That means that it must be large enough and of a high enough quality stone. If it’s not large enough or if the stone is poor quality, it will crack and the building can begin to shift.

In our passage from Ephesians 2, the Apostle Paul says that *we* are the building that is being built, “a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” Paul is saying that when we are adopted by God into His “household,” that *we* become the temple where God dwells. Listen again beginning in verse 17: “And he (Jesus) came and preached peace to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, *built* on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the

cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.”

What the Holy Spirit is building is a holy temple in the Lord, a dwelling place for God. But it’s not a building like the temple in Jerusalem had been. When Jesus was crucified the curtain in the temple in front of the Holy of Holies, where the presence of God was, ripped in half symbolizing that God’s presence was no longer in that one place. He was building this new temple, the Church.

When I say “the Church,” I don’t mean buildings or denominations. The Church is people. Because of Jesus’ work on the cross, we now are adopted into God’s household. That’s what it means to belong to a church. It’s an outward sign of our citizenship in heaven that Paul talks about in verse 19. The point is that this holy temple is all of us together. In verse 22, when he says, “you also are being built together...,” the word you is actually plural. A better translation would be, “In Jesus *y’all* are being built *together* into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. It’s no accident that Paul says we are “fellow citizens.” Citizenship comes with rights and privileges, but it also comes with responsibilities. We each have responsibilities to each other in the Church.

The second thing Paul says about this new temple is that it’s “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” This clearly refers to the Bible, both the Old Testament (what he calls the prophets) and the New Testament (the apostles). That means one of our responsibilities of citizenship is to read and study and know God’s Word. Just as ignorance of traffic laws is no excuse for breaking them, ignorance of God’s Word is no excuse for not living the way God instructs us.

Finally, Paul says that “Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone.” In our reading from Matthew 21 we hear Jesus claiming that he is the one referred to in Psalm 118 as the stone that the builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone. Without Jesus, and in particular without the death and resurrection of Jesus, there is no valid Christian faith. Everything that we believe rests on the truth the God came to earth as one of us, lived a sinless life, was executed, died and was buried and that on the third day he walked out of that tomb alive again.

When the mason finished laying the cornerstone square and level and properly aligned, it was said to be “true.” Jesus, the cornerstone of our faith, is “true” because He is the truth. He is the standard for what is square and level and aligned. Everything that’s good and right about the church is good because it lines up with the truth of Jesus.

It’s the same in our personal lives. Those things in our lives that do not line up with God’s Word are not built on the solid foundation of Christ and His Word. The question for you is this: Are you building on that solid foundation, which is here in the church, or are you still building as if you are “strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world?” Paul reminds us in verse 13: “now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” Build on that cornerstone and foundation and I think you will find that He is able to bear whatever weight we can put on Him.

Amen