

“FROM THE QUARRY TO THE TEMPLE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: I Kings 6:1-2, 7; I Peter 2:4-6

Introduction

What a day it must have been. The excitement must have been thick enough to cut with a knife. The day of the dedication of Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem. All of Israel from Dan to Beersheba was gathered to behold this magnificent sight.

The massive limestone block glistening in the sun, the polished granite, the huge beams hewn from the great cedars of Lebanon, the ornate carvings, the beautiful bronze basins and golden altar.

How many proud fathers were there pointing out to their children what they had done, carving these stones, cutting those timbers, sculpting that capital on top of that pillar.

And the animals, 22,000 bulls and 120,000 sheep to be sacrificed to God on that day, and then feasted on for the next eight days. What a day it must have been. But it was a day seven years in the making.

How do you build a physical temple?

In the first chapters of I Kings David died and Solomon is seated on the throne of David as the new king. Just four years into his reign, Solomon sets out to build a great temple, the single greatest undertaking of his reign.

II Chronicles 2:5 “The temple I am going to build will be great, because our God is greater than all other gods.”

For this great work Solomon conscripted 30,000 laborers from Israel. There were stonecutters, masons and carpenters, as well as men skilled in every kind of work in gold and silver, bronze and iron—craftsmen beyond number (see I Chronicles 22:15-16). He took the aliens living in the land and put them to work, 70,000 as carriers and haulers; 80,000 as stonecutters in the quarries in the limestone hills of Palestine, 3,600 as foreman, 250 as supervisors.

I Kings 5:17 “At the king’s command they removed from the quarry large blocks of quality stone to provide a foundation of dressed stone for the temple. **18** The craftsmen of Solomon and Hiram and the men of Gebal cut and prepared the timber and stone for the building of the temple.”

Some of these stones were 10 to 15 feet in size. Massive stones requiring enormous manpower to move. Cedar and juniper from Lebanon, too many to be numbered, were floated down the Mediterranean to Joppa and carried inland 60 or 70 miles up to Jerusalem, up hill all the way.

Nearly 4,000 tons of gold, 40,000 tons of silver and quantities of bronze and iron too great to be weighed were gathered and carried to Jerusalem.

All over the land and in the neighboring countries you could hear the sounds of a great labor. In the quarries and mines you could hear the sounds of cutting, breaking, chipping, the sounds of axes and chisels. In the forests you could hear the sounds of mighty cedar crashing to the forest floor, cutting, trimming, the sounds of saws and axes.

In the red hot furnaces in the plains of the Jordan between Succoth and Zarethan (I Kings 7:46-47) casts were made and poured for bowls, basins, pillars, decorative work, tables, lampstands, altars, weighing so much the weight wasn't determined.

On the roads and highways the sounds of great exertion as tens of thousands of men labored and struggled to carry massive stones and giant timbers up to Jerusalem. In all it took two hundred thousand men nearly seven years to build the great temple of God.

But the most stunning aspect about this great work is captured in one verse.

I Kings 6:7 “In building the temple, only blocks dressed at the quarry were used, and no hammer, chisel or any other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built.”

All the work had been done by the time it arrived there. All the stone had been hewn and dressed and finish to its exact size and shape for its exact place in the temple. All the lumber had been cut and trimmed for its exact purpose. In Jerusalem everything fit together perfectly and beautifully, at the temple site there was not the sound of any hammer or chisel or any iron tool.

What does this have to do with us? I want to take the rest of the time this morning show how what was true then is still true today.

This OT story is a powerful and beautiful picture of us and the Church of Jesus Christ. We are the raw materials being cut and crafted and shaped to fit together into the great temple of our God. In the words of Peter we are living stones. He writes:

I Peter 2:4-5 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— **5** you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Peter knows a thing or two about rocks. He is one. Jesus said to Simon, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it (Matthew 16:18).”

Paul adds to this picture when he writes in Ephesians 2:19-22:

Ephesians 2:19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, **20** *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.* **21** In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. **22** And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

How do you build a spiritual temple?

I want us to get a mental picture of this process of being living stones being fit and prepared to become a holy temple, a great spiritual, heavenly temple, being built in the heavenly Jerusalem.

The foundation has been laid and it's perfect and precious. Jesus Christ is the great cornerstone. God gives Christ the place of highest honor at the head of the corner. From that beginning point everything else takes shape. The prophets and apostles are the rest of the foundation. On this foundations the great Master Architect and Master Builder is building a heavenly temple, living stone by living stone.

Millions and millions of living stones being gathered from quarries all over the world.

But there is no sound of a hammer, chisel, saw, iron tool, axe, drill, power tool, no such sound in heaven.

Why not? Because everything in heaven is perfect, without spot or blemish. The building material that's brought there is pure, finished, complete, dressed stone, ready to fit into place.

Think with me about this process of preparing building material, of cutting stone and dressing it or finishing it for a spiritual temple.

This world of ours is the quarry; the job site. It's a noisy dirty, dusty place. It's a dangerous place. There is heavy equipment at work, tools that can kill you if you aren't careful. You have to wear a hard hat and watch your step. There are stones scattered everywhere. God picks through the rubble to select the pieces He wants to use. He, better than anyone, can see past what it is to what it will be and how He means to fit it in.

The people working there are a rough crowd. God uses all manner of people to accomplish His purposes and do His will. He used kings like King Hiram of Tyre who helped Solomon. He used foreigners, pagan, heathens, all manner of people who will never enter the sanctuary or see the finished building. Across our paths will come some harsh, rough, coarse people who will have no interest at all in us or God or the work God is doing in us. They are just instruments unawares of His glory, just as many wicked rulers and people in Scripture were.

On earth we don't know what the Master Architect and Builder is up to or why, so there are lots of discussions and lots of dissension among the workers, even among the Christians, the living stones who are being hewn for a Godly purpose. We don't know how the various pieces relate and fit.

It just looks like chaos to us. Factories and quarries are like that. They are far from the temple, far from the plan and purpose. We foolishly try to judge God by our feeble sense of things. We get impatient and irritated with the slow progress or painful process. It seems inefficient or unnecessary.

We try to figure it all out here. We try to control events, and arrange the pieces in some semblance of what we think the order should be. We disagree with the specs and the standards and the codes. And all the while the Master Builder surveys the scene, selecting this piece and that process, calling for this refinement and that cutting. Some of the pieces take more work than others; sometimes because of their original condition, sometimes because of their final purpose.

Then just when each piece is finished in its own time, sometimes too soon, sometimes not soon enough, He removes it from the quarry and places it in His heavenly temple in the exact spot He

had planned for it all along. It slips into place perfectly exactly according to His design. And it's beautiful, glorious, and absolutely spectacular.

Etta Fransen slipped quietly and perfectly into her place in God's glorious temple yesterday morning. We have talked over the past several weeks about being patient with God's process.

When we get to heaven we will be ashamed of our complaining, grumbling, disputing, fussing and fuming all during the process. We will be in awe of the craftsmanship of the Master Builder. The angels will be constantly remarking, "They don't make 'em like that any more." The quality of the work will leave us breathless and speechless.

But that quality comes with a price. Crafting living stones for the temple of the living God comes at a great cost.

We think that once we become Christians, everything should basically become better and better. Our happiness and success should climb, our marriages and kids should all start to improve, our job and school should be wonderful; tension, stress, frustration, disappointment should all become part of the past.

We think we are basically fine the way we are. We don't know what's in our hearts that must be cut away.

Chisels are painful because chiseling is personal. It's personal because we are not just rocks, we are people, in fact, sons and daughters. God says that He disciplines those whom He loves (Hebrews 12:6). He disciplines us because of our sin. His Spirit at work in us is convicting us of our sin, our self-centeredness, our selfishness, self-reliance, self-righteousness, of our lust for the treasures and pleasures of this life. He's rooting out the deep root of sin that we might reap a harvest of righteousness and share in His holiness in heaven, for without holiness no one will see God.

This sanctifying work is a spiritual work, a holy work, a labor of love to remove our old nature, our flesh, our idols, the things most dear to us and we grasp so hard, the sin that clings so tightly.

God has a thousand chisels in His tool box. What is the chisel in your life? A husband or a wife, a child or a parent, an employer or employee, a customer or client, a teacher or student, a pastor or elder or church member, a sickness or injury or accident, the death of a child or a handicap, an affliction or pain, a tragedy or disaster, a fire, a flood, a business loss or failure, a recession or investment gone bad; a multitude of sins.

How do you handle the chisels, the setbacks, the disappointments, the failed expectations, the heartaches and headaches, the tragedies, the bitter providences of your life? What do you do? Where do you turn? How do you make sense of it all?

Application and Conclusion.

My first challenge for us is to draw near to Christ. Do not be quarry stone that's cast aside, don't endure these days and have it come to nothing. Turn to Christ the Cornerstone.

My second challenge for us is that we would encourage each other. Some are under the chisel, in a particularly painful part of the journey, some are weary and weak. Come along side,

encourage them, pray for them, walk with them, remind them of what is true and eternal, of the hope of glory. Comfort and support one another. Some of us are in really hard places enduring especially hard refining.

My third challenge for us is to overcome our temptation to grumble, complain or doubt by trusting God's sovereign goodness and His eternal purposes.

Remember how Hebrews says Abraham made sense of life's chisels?

Hebrews 11:10 He was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Seeing the end and the purpose changes our understanding. The light of eternity makes our current shadows much less frightening.

Trust God's wisdom in all our afflictions when He chooses what kind of affliction He has us endure, this one and not that one; at this time and not that time; to this degree and not that degree. Can we learn to trust God and even thank God for His furnace and His chisel?

Trust His faithfulness and sufficiency as He supports us in every trial and never leaves us or forsakes us; that He does all things for our good, not necessarily for our comfort or ease. He will take away what we love most or trust in most if it is in the way of our trusting and loving Him most. He has made us and is making us for His glory, rest in the joy of His perfect purpose. There are unexpected afflictions and trials ahead, all perfectly planned by God for His specific purposes.

“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.” (I Cor. 15:19) But our hope is in heaven, in Him who is our living Stone and through whom God is making us living stones in a spiritual temple more splendid and glorious than Solomon's temple.

II Corinthians 4:16-18 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Let us pray and earnestly ask the Lord to make us all living stones fit for His temple at whatever the cost, for surely this is better than any pleasures this short live might afford us.