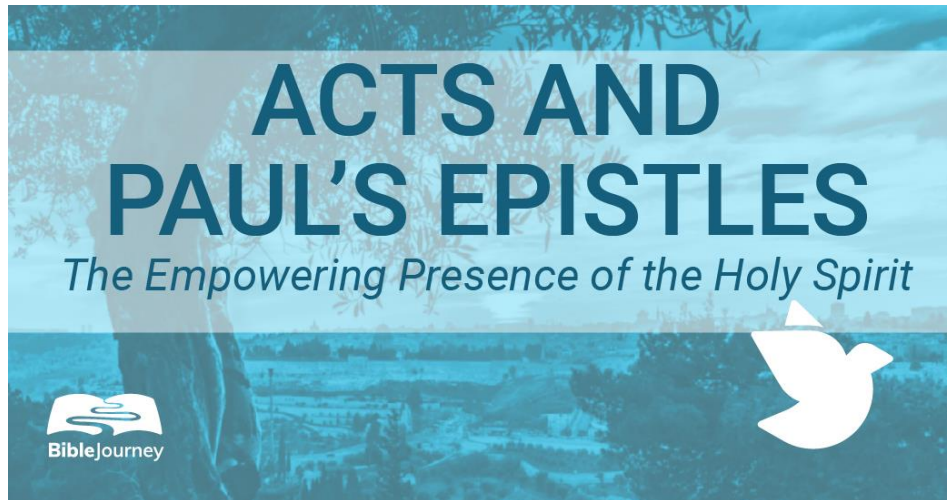


**God's Master Building Plan**  
**May-June Sermon Series**  
Kenwood Baptist Church  
Pastor David Palmer  
June 6, 2021

**TEXT: Ephesians 2:10-22**



Good morning, Beloved. It's a privilege to open God's Word and to learn and grow together. I encourage you to keep Ephesians open before you. We're going to be focused in chapter 2, but I want to look at the prayer of chapter 1 and a key verse in chapter 3 this morning. As we begin, I want to invite you to think of a building that takes your breath away, maybe one that you see from the outside, one that you walk into that really impacts you. Think about what it is about this structure that moves your heart or mind or fires your imagination or makes you feel a certain way. There are two buildings that are my favorites in the world. I'm going to tell you one of them at the end of the sermon, but I want you to think about yours right now. What is a building that takes your breath away?

As we look this morning, we are in a series focused on the Holy Spirit in Paul's letters. We're looking at passages that describe the work and presence and power of the Spirit. What happens when God's personal, empowering presence comes upon a group of people, not just individuals, but a whole group, a family, a body? What would it look like and where would it lead? It's an experience of God's power in our lives. God's presence—His empowering presence—is at work among us and makes us into the people that we long to become. We have been praying throughout the early weeks of this series for God's presence, for the Spirit to come upon us in power. I want to start this morning with the prayer that Paul himself prays for the Ephesians. It's a fantastic prayer. The Bible is filled with prayers. Look at this prayer with me in Ephesians 1:17. Paul says: "I remember you in my prayers." Then this is the prayer:

*“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.”*

May He give you the Spirit, that is, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is described as the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation. It's a prayer that the Holy Spirit would fill the believers and give them wisdom, give them revelation and unveiling, so that they can see and know God. It's a prayer that the Holy Spirit would come to give us insight and allow us to see. The prayer continues in Ephesians 1:18 as a prayer for the eyes of your heart:

*“Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened.”*

Did you know your heart has eyes? In the Bible, the heart is the seat of the will, and the heart is often what we would describe as the mind. We typically use the word “enlightened” for the mind. In the Bible's idiom and sense of personhood, the heart is often the seat of decision-making, the seat of knowledge. It's a prayer that you would be enlightened, so you could see. Look what the prayer is that you would see. It is stunning. We read in Ephesians 1:18-19 that there are three things we would see:

*“Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe.”*

We would see, first, what the hope is to which He has called us. We talked about this last Sunday. The Christian hope is nothing less than having your life and mine be renewed and remade into Christ's likeness. Second, that we would be enlightened to see what the riches of the glorious inheritance are that we have. The inheritance to which we are assigned, together with Christ, is nothing less than the renewed heavens and earth, that God has promised to set creation free from sin and evil and death, and that we will inherit, together with Christ, this whole new world. It's a stunning thought.

This morning I want to focus on this third element of Paul's prayer: the prayer that your eyes would see the *immeasurable greatness of God's power*. That language of power and might, of energy, is language that Paul uses to describe the effect of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit comes and works among us, He gives us wisdom and insight. He empowers our obedience. He gives us vision to see what we are hoping for. He illuminates our minds and our hearts to see God's character. This final prayer is that He would give us the Holy Spirit to enable us to appreciate the greatness of His power. What is the greatness of God's power exerted for us in Christ? What does the Holy Spirit do in and through us, with us? I want us to see, as this passage unfolds in Ephesians 2, that there are three things that happened and are on Paul's mind. They are born out of his experience, both as an individual and also as a church planter, seeing communities be born and seeing those communities change and influence and impact

their surrounding environment. So let's look at what happens when God's great power in the Holy Spirit is exerted for our sake:

**Number one:** The first of these is in the first half of Ephesians 2. When we begin chapter 2, we look pretty bad. We're in rough shape—we're dead. We are dead people in Ephesians 2. We are dead in trespasses and sins. We're the "walking dead." We're following, without even realizing it in certain cases, the pattern or design of this world. We're going along, uncritically, with a death-dealing pattern of living. In Ephesians 2:1-2, we read:

*"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience."*

We are not only going with the course of this world, we're following in Ephesians 2:2 *"the prince of the power of the air."* Everyone is being influenced by spiritual power. That's the truth. You're either being influenced and empowered by the Holy Spirit of God or you're following a course or pattern of this world, and you are going uncritically and sometimes unaware of a spirit, which he describes as guiding us into disobedience. None of us are neutral. It's a myth. None of us are independent, no matter how many times we claim to be so, we're all following someone. We're all animated, empowered, by a pattern of life. Our situation looks pretty bad. In Ephesians 2:3-4, we read:

*"Among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us. . ."*

We're living according to the passions of our own flesh. We're limited by what we desire. We not only aspire to what we desire, we carry it out. We are children who provoke the wrath of God, which is a sobering phrase.

Parents have long fuses. They have longer fuses with their own children than with other people's children. Have you noticed in the grocery store that parents get really upset with noisy kids who aren't their own kids? A noisy, destructive child who is not your own can fire you up just like that. With your own child, you wait and you wait. You're patient. Then at a certain point wrath is aroused. My favorite moment in the grocery store with a wrath-aroused parent was in Clifton. It was an Israeli mother who was there, and her child was unruly, trying to grab the jellies and jams off the shelves and really wreaking havoc at the grocery store. The mother turned to the child, and she said, *"Dai! Dai!"* The workers at the grocery store were pulling out their phones. They were concerned: "What's going to happen next?" They didn't realize that she was speaking Hebrew to the child, and in Hebrew the word *"dai"* means "enough," "that's enough," "stop it." So this mother is going through the aisle, saying, "Stop it, that's enough,

don't do that," and all these clerks are thinking, "She's about to kill the child." Context matters, doesn't it?

We are in a desperate situation, walking dead, trapped in our own desires, following the pattern of this world. The first great effect of God's power coming to bear on your life and mine is in Ephesians 2:4-5:

*"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved."*

But God! That is a fantastic turn. We were the "walking dead," the trapped people, bound by our own desires, following the course of this world, following the enemy of our souls, provoking the wrath of God. But God acted, and He made us alive. You can't do that for yourself, and neither can I. By grace, we have been saved. By the overwhelming grace and love of God, in His mercy, without anything of our own doing, He speaks the Word, and we become alive. That's power, isn't it? That's spiritual power. That's Holy Spirit power to make dead people alive. It's just like in the early chapters of the Bible, when God breathes His spirit, and we become alive.

**Number two:** In Ephesians 2:6, we read:

*"And raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."*

Not only does God act in the power of the Spirit to make us alive, but He raises us up from the dead and seats us with Christ in heavenly places. This is something that should take up more of our mental space than it does. God in Christ has joined us with Him. He has brought the dead to life. He has raised us, and He has placed us with Christ in heavenly places and seated us with Him. We grossly underestimate who we are to become. God's grace is on display in this power to make us alive, to forgive us of our sins, to seat us together with Christ. Number one, He makes us alive. Number two, He raises us and seats us.

**Number three:** In Ephesians 2:10, we discover that in Christ, by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, we become His workmanship:

*"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."*

We are said to be God's workmanship, the product of the Master craftsman, God's fashioning, His making of us. Now we're prepared to go through the rest of the chapter to see how God's power is at work and what God's master building project is. What is He doing with us as His

workmanship? He takes us and fashions us, and what does He do? Three beautiful things I see:

**Quarrying the raw materials.** The first, for God's master building plan, is that he quarries the raw materials. God goes out, and He finds raw materials. Look at the raw material starting in Ephesians 2:11:

*“Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands.”*

Remember that the word “Gentile” is just the Latin for “nations.” I hope our children and grandchildren end up with English Bibles that don't have the word “Gentile.” It should be translated as “nations.” It's the same word that Jesus uses in the great commission: *“Go make disciples of all nations.”* Remember that you are nations, and you are far off. “Gentile” sometimes has a pejorative meaning, just like the word “pagan.” “Pagan” is the Latin word for country bumpkin. It's the person who lives far off—way out there. God sees the “way out” people, the outsiders, and He goes after them. Look at this. Remember, you were Gentiles, outsiders, pagans, far off ones. You even labeled the un-circumcision, that is, the not-covenant folks. Remember, you were separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth visitor. You were strangers to the covenants. You had no hope, and you were without God in the world. You were far off. But God acts in Ephesians 2:13:

*“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”*

God goes out and quarries the raw materials for His master building project. It's a fascinating project to watch some master craftsmen quarry stone. Some stones in Israel in the first century are massive. Some stones are larger than school buses, and they've been quarried and brought to the construction site. I remember going through the Western Wall Tunnel with a stonemason, and he said there's no way that that stone is quarried. It's too big. It must just be dressed bedrock. We came up to it, and he looked at it and became silent—you know, that reverential silence of the stonemason. He gasped for breath, and he said, “It's a quarried stone.” It's a quarried stone—600 tons. How do you quarry a 600-ton stone and move it without modern equipment? They did. God quarries these stones, and He not only quarries them, but He brings them to the construction site. Keep your eye on them. The second thing that God does is not only quarry the stone, the raw material, but He comes to the construction site and performs a masterful demolition.

**Tearing down walls.** For God's project to continue, there must be demolition. Not only does God quarry the raw materials and bring them to the site, but He has to destroy or take down elements that are on the existing site. In Ephesians 2:14, we read:

*“For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility.”*

Jesus Christ, the Master Builder, comes not only to quarry the raw materials, but He also destroys whatever stands in the way of the master building project. He tears this wall down. For Paul, this has a very specific and concrete reference. It's real in his own life. It's the very reason

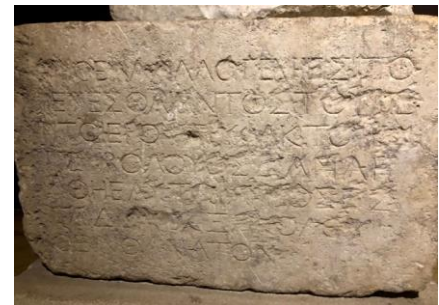


why he's in jail right now, writing this letter, because he had come to worship in the temple courts. He brought with him the fruit of his ministry in transformed lives, and some of those were Greeks from Asia Minor, men like Tychicus and Trophimus. They came to worship in the outer courts of the sanctuary, the Temple Mount, the largest public square in the ancient world. On the perimeter of the sanctuary, there is a very low wall, four feet high. That wall was

interspersed with warning stones, marking out that no foreigner could come past this line. Two of these stones have been found. One is in the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul. It was found, reused, in a school on the Temple Mount. It was found by a French archaeologist when



Israel was still part of the Ottoman Empire, and that's why it's in the museum in Istanbul. It's in a back corner. It's not well lit. It's not given the pride of



place that it would be given if it were in Israel. It could've been the very stone past which Paul walked with his friends. This stone wall, though it's low, is symbolic, and it says: “This is the line. This divides Israel from the nations, and the nations are back, and you can't come farther.” The Greek inscription in all capitals says quite clearly that no foreigner can come past this line, and if you do, then you yourself are responsible for your ensuing death, whether that's carried out by God or by the temple guard. The stones were painted with red letters in these inset markings. Paul says that this wall, this very wall, has come down in Christ. God's plan is to quarry stones from those who are far off, separated, and to tear down the wall of division, which He also labels, not just as a symbolic wall, but as a wall of hostility.

Every culture, whether it's first century Israel, whether it's 21<sup>st</sup> century China, whether it's 21<sup>st</sup> century America, every culture has these symbolic walls of division. We mark out the wall, and every time we mark it, we are on the inside of it. I've never met anyone who has described a

wall and found himself on the outside of it. We build walls, some four feet high, some higher than that, some with words, some with categories, and Paul says, "In Christ, that's come down." That's come down, and it's critical. It's critical, Brothers and Sisters, that there are twenty languages spoken at Kenwood Baptist Church. It's critical to God's master building project, and yet, just as in first century Israel, we like to build walls. We like to build them here as well.

I love the poetry of Robert Frost. His poem "Mending Wall" is a very provocative exploration of why we build these walls. Our kids live in New England, and all around New England there are these stone walls. As people try to clear their fields, they take the stones that they pull out of the ground in order to grow crops, and they build these small walls. They are beautiful, and you can take pictures of them. Robert Frost sees these walls, and he says:

"Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That sends the frozen ground-swell under it,  
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,  
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast."

He said, "Something there is that doesn't really want the wall there." Even the ground, when it freezes in the winter, pushes up and makes the wall start to come apart, and yet, he said, "I've come in the springtime to rebuild the wall." He says in the poem, "I meet my neighbor there, and we start putting the wall back up. On a day we meet and walk the line and set the wall between us again." He begins to wonder in the poem, since his neighbor has pine trees, and he has apple trees, why do we really need a wall? He said,

"My apple trees will never get across  
And eat the cones under his pines."

The neighbor replies, with that proverbial wisdom:

"Good fences make good neighbors."

That's not in the Bible, though. In the poem Frost begins to wonder. He says, "Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder if I could put a notion in my neighbor's head: 'Why do they make good neighbors?'"

"Something there is that doesn't love a wall."

Something wants it down. He looks across this wall, and he says:

"I see him there  
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top  
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.  
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,  
Not of woods only and the shade of trees."

He will not go behind his father's saying,  
And he likes having thought of it so well  
He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'"

The poem ends leaving you with a longing for the wall to come down, but how? In Ephesians 2, the wall comes down in Jesus Christ who quarries the stone, brings it to the site, and tears down that which divides us. In Jesus Christ, we stand on level ground at the foot of the cross. All nations are invited to Him. There's no way to draw the map of the kingdom, like that bounded set we talked about a few weeks ago, that keeps people as second-class citizens or strangers to God's promise. The walls come down, and society gets changed as a result.

One of my heroes is William Carey, a British missionary who went to India. He was a pioneering missionary, who worked for many, many years before his first convert. The first convert ever was a man named Krishna Pal. Named for a Hindu deity, Krishna Pal received Christ and was baptized. Soon thereafter, another man, named Krishna Prasad, became a believer. This conversion produced a very early controversy in this infant church in India, because Krishna Pal was of the Sudra cast, and Krishna Prasad was of the Brahman class. The early missionaries faced a critical question. The question was: Does the gospel overturn the caste system? Some of you may not feel this acutely, but let me tell you that they felt it acutely, and it was a life-and-death question. They faced the very specific question: Do we need to have separate communion trays for the Brahmin caste and the untouchables? Do we need to have separate spaces for those of this highest class to maintain their separation from those of the lowest class? Some early believers said that this is just part of Indian culture, and so we do. We need separate trays. But William Carey, with trembling lips, said, "No. We have one set. We have one set of communion trays, because we have one Savior who died for all. We have one set of communion trays, and if God has forgiven us all in Jesus Christ, that means that our cultural patterns are overturned wherever they obscure the gospel and what God is building." Some people became angry, but Carey stood his ground. As momentous as the moment was when Krishna Pal became a believer and when Krishna Prasad became a believer, it was even more momentous when these two men and these two families from totally different classes, whose culture told them they cannot be in the same room together and cannot have physical contact with each other, came together and broke the body of Christ and said, "Here we stand; it's a new humanity." Beloved, the wall comes down. There is something in us that doesn't like a wall, isn't there? But we're just not sure how to take it down sometimes, and I want to tell you that Jesus Christ has taken it down. In a few minutes, all who have received Him can partake together. God's master building plan quarries stones. God's master building plan has site demolition.

**Constructing the breathtaking dwelling of God.** At the end of Ephesians 2, we see what He is

actually building. It's beautiful. In Ephesians 2:19, we read:

*"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,"*

And then we finally see the structure. God quarried the stones and brought them to the site. He cleared the site in order to build something new, and every element of the building that God builds is alive. Then we read in Ephesians 2:20-21, it is:

*"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.*

The evidence of Christ's coming, His dying, His rising, is evident in the world by the transformed lives of individual people who become hewn stones, fashioned together into a living temple as a dwelling place of God by the Spirit. The same Spirit who came and filled the tabernacle, who came and filled the temple that Solomon built, now comes to fill this living, growing, rising edifice of changed human beings. It's breathtaking. Paul says the church's rising up is so breathtaking that it takes the breath away from the cosmos. He says in Ephesians 3:10 of this building, this living, fashioning structure, the church, the assembly of the redeemed:

*". . .so that through the church the manifold diverse wisdom of God is made known to rulers and authorities in heavenly places."*

Did you know that when we gather for worship here and when other gospel preaching churches gather for worship, heavenly powers look on in astonishment at what God is building? Do you know that demonic powers look on with terror?

What building takes your breath away? My favorite building in the world is the Acropolis Museum in Athens, designed by Swiss-American architect Bernard Tschumi. It's an amazing building. It is five-stories high and the walls are glass. When they started building the building, they realized they were uncovering the ancient ruins of Athens on the construction site, so they made an adjustment to make all the floors glass so you could look down and see the ancient city. The best part of the building is the top floor, the



Parthenon Gallery. It's the museum's show-case piece. When you're on the top floor and you look and you see what look like columns and you see elements of the Parthenon, and then comes this dramatic moment for every



visitor when they turn and look up through the glass windows and they see the actual

Parthenon and it looks like it's floating on top of the Acropolis. I love to watch the faces of people when they start to draw the architectural lines and suddenly realize that they're standing within the actual dimensions of the real Parthenon. It's like the structure on the mountain has slipped off and floated down and they're standing in it. It's a breathtaking and brilliant design.

As much as this building moves my heart, my absolute favorite structure is one not built with human hands. It's when I look at you. It's like you slipped off the mountain and floated down in the perfect architectural lines with God, the Master craftsman, cutting off the rough edges and fitting you in next to each other. It's so beautiful. Polishing the edges, putting His signature design, fitting you in next to one you may have hated, filling the structure with His presence and inviting all who are far off and near together. You can look all around this building and you'll never see or find a dividing wall. It's gone. This is God's master plan. This is His Church. This is the Table of the King, to which we're all invited, and this is the building of which we are a part.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.