Opening Words

Isn't this an amazing chapter? Isn't this an amazing truth? God made you and me into his dwelling! What kind of God is this? What kind of love would do this for us? The love of God in Jesus Christ!

36 Eph The Goal of God's People

> 17 AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE
> NEAR; 18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are
> no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's
> household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus
> Himself being the corner *stone*, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing
> into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of
> God in the Spirit.

What awe-inspiring words and it strikes me how these words are so different from the words spoken at the beginning of chapter 2. Paul began this chapter with the true, but dismal words that we were dead in our trespasses and sins, but he ends with words of life – God dwelling among his people.

I read something years ago about the book of Genesis. Genesis begins with God creating all things. It begins with life. But Genesis ends with a story of death – the death of Joseph in Egypt and the last words of Genesis are "a coffin in Egypt." What a contrast. The book started out gloriously with life and ended ingloriously with death.

But Ephesians 2 reverses this – It begins with death in trespasses and sins and ends with life in the presence of God. Let's look at this passage together and learn what was on Paul's mind.

The main topic of the final verses is God's people united as a glorious temple in which God dwells. This is what our unity with one another is for … that we might unite as a temple for God. What is a temple for? It is for worship of a deity and Paul shows us that God unites us with one another so that we might become a place of worship. What a contrast with the unity the world talks about. The world does talk about unity, you know.

My wife and I enjoy watching the Olympics. We love many of the events and we love the opening and closing ceremonies. We note how the commentators often remark how the Olympics bring nations together, at least the athletes, in friendship and harmony and we can appreciate this. But this kind of unity falls far short of what God has in mind. We have a fantasy as we watch the nations come in with their flags and colorful clothing – our fantasy is for them to march in and give honor to the King of kings. That is not a fantasy because one day the nations will bring their honor and glory to the King. We look forward to it.

The United Nations deliberates to bring peace to the world. Other organizations seek to bring peace by bringing help and relief. And sometimes these can bring positive results but I must ask, "what is

their ultimate vision for unity? Is it only peace? Is it only the absence of war? Is it only the defeat of injustice? Although these are noble goals, they fall short of the ultimate reason for unity which finds expression in Paul's words in verses 20-22. Listen to them again.

> having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

When God created the earth, placed man in the garden, and gave him the commission to be fruitful and multiply, his goal was for man to turn earth into a paradise of praise for God. It was normal for Adam and Eve to meet with God. They recognized his steps as he was approaching them. God manifested himself to our first parents, and if they had not sinned and if sin and death had not entered the world we can imagine a world filled with perfect people and God walking among us. But that did not happen. Man sinned and was banished from the garden. The presence of God became less and less manifest on earth as humanity became more and more wicked.

When God entered a covenant with Israel, he spent much time giving them instructions for building the tabernacle which was also called the tent of meeting because this is where God would meet with his people. The 12 tribes would pitch their tents, and among those tents was the tent of meeting where God would reveal his glory. God was once again on earth among his people. The same thing happened in the temple. Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem, and there God revealed himself.

But God had more in mind. As gracious as God was to dwell in the tent of meeting and in Solomon's temple, his real goal was to live in and among his people. Listen to these words from the first two verses of Isaiah 66.

> Thus says the LORD, "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? 2 "For My hand made all these things, thus, all these things came into being," declares the LORD. "But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.

Did God want to live in a building made of wood, stone, and precious gems? No, he wanted to live in his people and among his people. This was his goal. God's greatest creation was not trees from which we get wood and earth from which we dig up rock and precious gems to beautify things. God's greatest creation was man made in his image, and from the beginning God's greatest goal was to live in and among his people.

And this is what Paul is talking about in this passage. He calls Christ the cornerstone of the whole Church, the universal Church. We all know what a cornerstone is and how important it is. A cornerstone is the starting place for a monumental building. It is laid with precision and every other stone is laid in relation to the cornerstone. Every other stone must match the cornerstone perfectly. Jesus is the cornerstone and every other part of the foundation must be laid in perfect precision according to the same angle of the cornerstone. Paul says the rest of the building blocks for the foundation are the apostles and the prophets for the apostles and prophets give testimony to Jesus Christ – who he is and what he has done for us.

This title of Christ as cornerstone is based on the prophecy of Psalm 118:22, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner *stone*." The builders were the Jewish nation but they rejected their Messiah. But the one they rejected was exonerated by God. God raised him from the dead and enthroned him at his right hand and this rejected stone became the cornerstone of God's rebuilding project to create a temple of praise for himself on earth.

This rebuilding project involves you and me. This rebuilding project is more than the cornerstone and more than the apostles and prophets for Paul tells us that you and I have been built on this foundation. In Christ, the whole edifice is being constructed into a holy temple. And then he says in verse 22, "and you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."

Paul began this chapter by saying, "you were dead in your trespasses and sins." He said in verse 12, "remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." But in the great reversal he says that you are now being built into a dwelling of God. And although Paul did not say so at this point, he could have said, "by grace you have been saved."

Isn't this an amazing chapter? Isn't this an amazing truth? God made you and me into his dwelling! What kind of God is this? What kind of love would do this for us? The love of God in Jesus Christ!

All this reminds me what our priority as a church should be. Years ago, in a church where I pastored, some of us were discussing what should happen on Sunday morning in church. Should it be evangelism or should it be edification? Should it be a time to reach the lost or should it be for God's people? The evangelists in our midst were passionate and wanted it to be for the lost. The teachers in our midst were passionate and wanted it to be for the saved.

One day I realized we were all wrong! I shared with everyone that Sunday morning, when the church gathers was primarily – for God! Yes, we could do evangelism on Sunday morning. We must do it and share the Gospel! And yes, we must use Sunday morning when the church gathers to build up the people, but if we forget who we are, a holy temple, a holy temple and a dwelling of God, then we have missed the mark.

John gives us a vision of our ultimate future. He said this in Revelation 21:3 and 21:22.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,

I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

My friends, this is our future – to be the temple of God – for God to dwell among us and for us to worship and glorify him forever! This is a wonder of the spiritual world!