

“Building God’s Way”

<u>Occasion</u>	Evening Service at Therfield Chapel
<u>Day, Date & Time</u>	Sunday 1 August 2004 at 18:30
<u>Basis</u>	Exodus 36:8-38
<u>Reading</u>	Exodus 36:8-38 1 Corinthians 3:9-15a
<u>Hymns</u>	7, 27, 25 from Mission Praise
<u>Songs</u>	40, 69, 389, 305 from Mission Praise
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What have you built this week?

One of the fascinating things about humanity
is that we are all creators.
God made man in his own image
and one of the attributes he passed on
was the ability to create.

We see it, of course
in other areas of creation too.

Birds build nests
and so do wasps.

When I took down our old wooden utility room,
I found a large wasp nest under the floor.
It was an incredible piece of engineering excellence.
Comprised of the lightest material,
it was in essence a multi storey building.
Each floor was comprised of hexagonal cells
forming what we call a honeycomb structure,
and each layer was distanced from the next
and supported on it by small pillars.
The workmanship was impeccable.

We also have enormous powers of ingenuity.
Again we see this in the animal world.

Did you see that clip on television of a group of monkeys,
somewhere in the world where it has been incredibly hot,
China I think it was.

They were actually throwing themselves off trees and rocks
into a pool of water to keep cool.

Yet nowhere in God's creation are these qualities so developed
as they are in human beings.

Many of course see this as support for the theory of evolution,
arguing that such qualities have merely evolved over millions of years
as we literally dragged ourselves out of the primeval soup
until we attained such advanced powers as we have today.

As a Biblical creationist myself,
I find such claims absurd,
but I cannot but concur that we do have these abilities.
But I believe that God made man
complete with these special attributes of creativity,
ingenuity
and reason,
together with the ability to love
and to build relationships.

Wherever we go,
we build.
We develop systems,
we build relationships,
we create families.
We erect factories,
office blocks,
apartments,
houses and hotels
bridges and tunnels
and even dams.

We build trains and cars,
railways and roads,
airplanes and airports.

We build warships,
tanks,
guns
and missiles.

We set up communication systems,
together with mobile phones,
radios,
televisions
and computers.

We organise businesses,
corporations,
clubs,
societies
and even churches.

If you go to Greece,
they build churches on every corner.
If you go to Turkey,
they build a mosque in every village.

It is what we do.
We build!

Yet at the same time
we have an enormous and frightening capacity to destroy.
Our factories pollute the rivers
and kill the fish;
Our dams destroy villages
and the livelihood of thousands of peasant families,
who then die of starvation and malnutrition,
or migrate to the cities where they create slums,
ghettoes,
violence,
drug trafficking
and prostitution,
just to survive.

We wage wars,
either for esoteric reasons to effect regime change,
or to grab land;
civil wars over ideologies,
ethnic conflict
or religious bigotry and hatred,
ruining the lives of thousands
and sometimes millions of people in the process;
And as Christians,
we hang our heads in shame
as the Church has blood on its hands
in many of these conflicts.

Yet even here
the ingenuity
and the compassionate nature of man
comes to the fore
as people of good will from all faiths and persuasions combine resources
and at great personal sacrifice
work to ameliorate the suffering at a local and personal level.

What an incredible race we are.

So I ask you the question again:
What have you built this week?

You cannot answer "Nothing",
because it would not be true.
For it is intrinsic in our very being to make something,
or to destroy something

In our passage tonight,
they built the tabernacle.

Three months ago,

I preached on chapter 26 under the title: 'God with us'.

We looked at God's instruction to build him a dwelling place amongst his people.

We described the richness of the materials from which it was to be made.

We noted the meticulous nature of the instructions.

We imagined building it to God's design here inside our humble chapel.

We recognised that God wants to dwell amongst his people.

He wants to have a relationship with us

and he wanted the people of Israel at that time

to build him a symbolic home

amongst his people.

Tonight they carried out his instructions

to the letter.

If you compare this passage with the equivalent verses in Chapter 26,

you will find no significant difference.

Then it was a design in God's imagination.

Now it becomes a reality.

Between then and now,

much has happened

Whilst Moses was up in the mountain the first time,

Aaron made the people a golden calf to worship instead of God,

and when Moses came down carrying the famous tablets of stone,

he threw them to the ground in anger

and smashed God's law to pieces.

The people's sin had to be punished

and many lost their lives,

and during that process,

the tribe of Levi were appointed to be the priestly tribe.

Then Moses pleaded with God for the people

and even offered to take God's wrath in their place,

and God relented and the people were forgiven.

Moses goes back up the mountain to get a new set of tablets

and brings them back to the people.

In last week's chapter,

offerings were collected

and the craftsmen were appointed to start to build the most magnificent

mobile temple one could imagine,

and so today a disciplined,

chagrined,

forgiven

and grateful people

begin to build to God's specification.

They build what God wants them to build.

They build it because he had instructed them

and because they wanted to worship the Lord

and have him dwell in their midst.
And they build it the way God wants it to be built.

When I first looked at this portion,
I thought it was just a repeat of the one I preached on in May.
There they were told what to do
and here they did it.
Then suddenly,
it hit me.
They actually did it!!

So often we know *what* God wants us to do,
but we don't do it.
We know *how* he wants us to do it,
but we go off and do something else
and ask God to bless us when we have changed his instructions.
We know *why* God wants us to do something,
but we think we know better.

And then when things don't work out,
we wonder why
and blame God for letting us down.

If ever there was an example of this,
it is the question of human suffering.
God told Adam and Eve to be stewards of his creation,
but we have made a fist of it.
The vast majority of human suffering on this planet
can be attributed to our failure as a race
to care for our environment,
our failure to care for one another,
our rapacious use of power,
and man's inhumanity to man.

There are of course,
many facets to this debate,
but how dare we blame God.

What do we want God to do?
Stop us in our tracks and annihilate his people,
so they can do no more damage?

This is what Moses faced in Chapter 32,
when he pleaded with God
not to vent his wrath on the people due to their sinfulness.

And so the work proceeds according to God's instructions
and the model which God showed to Moses on mount Sinai.
And as we cover the last few chapters of Exodus,
we shall see the whole project come to life,
as the people obey God's instructions
and his dwelling place amongst his people is established.

Years ago, in the early 1800s, (nineteenth century)
two Christian men walked across the hills from Baldock to this village
and set up a bible class to teach the villagers of Therfield not only to read,
but also to read the Bible.

In due course that work yielded fruit
and a group of local farmers gave the land and the funds to build this Chapel
which was completed in 1836 at a cost of £260.
Eighteen years later more land was donated
and the Manse was added at a cost £400.

So it was that Therfield Chapel came into being,
as dedicated Christian men gave of their substance,
time
and energy
to provide a place where ordinary folk could meet with God.

They obeyed that special call from God
to fulfil his purposes in this village and this area.

Today,
we stand in that tradition,
continuing to maintain both the building and the church
(by that I mean the body of people who meet here,
for they are the real church)
so that there is a place where we can all meet with God,
worship him,
pray to him
and feed on spiritual food at his feet.

Maintaining that heritage
and obeying the call of God to serve him in so many different ways
is not easy.

It is demanding, both in time,
finance,
energy
and often at great cost to family life,
nervous exhaustion
and long hours,
yet we as a church do it gladly and willingly,
because we hear his call to serve
and follow that call.

Which brings me to the question of obedience.
When I hear some sermons on obedience,
I am left thinking what a chore this is.

I hate the word.
It implies that I have to do things which I don't want to do
in a way that I don't want to do them
for reasons I don't believe in.
It's a bit like the modern work place.

When I first started out in industry,
I loved it.

I had at last found something I loved to do
and I got paid for doing it.
But as time has moved on I find myself today,
doing things I don't believe in,
in a way that I don't enjoy,
to a standard well below that which I believe the job requires.

Obedience to God should never be like that.
God says that he will take our stony hearts
and replace them with hearts of flesh.

We do what God wants,
because we love to serve him and honour him.
We serve him because we adore him
and we long to do something for him
in response to his great love for us.
That is a joy to do
and so rewarding.

Serve God in that way and you will know real joy in your hearts.

Are you unhappy with your role in the Church?
Then get up and do something for God.
Never mind the ones beside you who are still bemoaning the way things are done
or not done.
Simply get off your bottoms and serve Jesus.

Christianity is positive.
What was it Jesus said?
Love the lord your God with all your hearts,
with all your mind
and with all your understanding
and your neighbour as your self
and all these things shall be added to you.

Obedience is not a chore,
but a natural outcome of affection and allegiance to God.
Go out and find the joy of the Lord!

And so as we serve him in this way,
we shall build his church
and the glory of the Lord will be there for all to see.

Yet we need to remember that we do not build just for today,
nor even for tomorrow,
but for eternity.

Nor do we build
just within the Christian fraternity.

As I said at the beginning,
we cannot help but build.
We shall either build for good
or for bad.

Everything we do has lasting consequences.
If we build badly,
 we cause damage,
 disillusionment
 and despair.
If we build well
 we inspire,
 we encourage
 and we leave a legacy for the good of our neighbours
 both in this world and the next.
Look then at your lives,
 your values
 and your motives.

What motivates your personal lifestyle?
 What drives your ambitions.
 What governs your attitudes to life
 and to other people.

Is the love of God,
 his holiness,
 his righteousness
 so much a part of your thinking that your whole way of life is
 directed by the presence of God.

If it is,
 then you will build well.
For you will not be governed by selfishness,
 nor earthly ambitions,
 but by the values and standards of God himself.

What I am trying to convey here is that the Christian life is not just church.
 We often let it become that,
 but we are wrong to do so.

We live in the world.
 We are part of it,
 but we are not of it.

We live in it,
 but not to its standards.

We have a part to play
 and we should play that part to the full.

How many secular organisations do you belong to?
 How much do you take part in the community.
How do people in your town and village know you are a Christian?
 Because you go to Church and pretend you don't belong to this world?
 Or because you play your part in the community as an upright moral
 God-fearing neighbour?

I leave you to decide which is the better profile.

Whatever you do,

you will build something.
You will build a reputation;
 You may build a family;
 You may build an extension to your house;
You will build relationships with the neighbours,
 your workmates,
 members of your family,
 the other mums at school;
You may build a church,
 or a society,
 or friendships.

Whatever you build make sure of one thing,
 that it is built for God.
 In his way
 and to his instructions.
What you build today will serve others
 and the fruits could well be eternal.

If you choose to tear down,
 you will build discord,
 disappointment
 and despair
 and again the fruits may well be eternal.

It is so easy to do,
 and so difficult to repair.
May God preserve us from building useless ruins.

The author of Hebrews reminds us that the tabernacle, though real,
 was but a shadow of that greater reality in the heavenly realm
 where God lives. (see Hebrews chapters 9&10)
 There is another sermon there
 and we will have to leave it for another time.

Enough to say that as we build too,
 we should have our sights set on another world,
 where God reigns in his glory
 and where all that we have done with our time on earth
 will be measured and weighed
 and we shall see what we have built and what it was worth.

Let us build then
 to God's design
 in Gods way
 and for him.

May it be so to the glory of his name

Amen