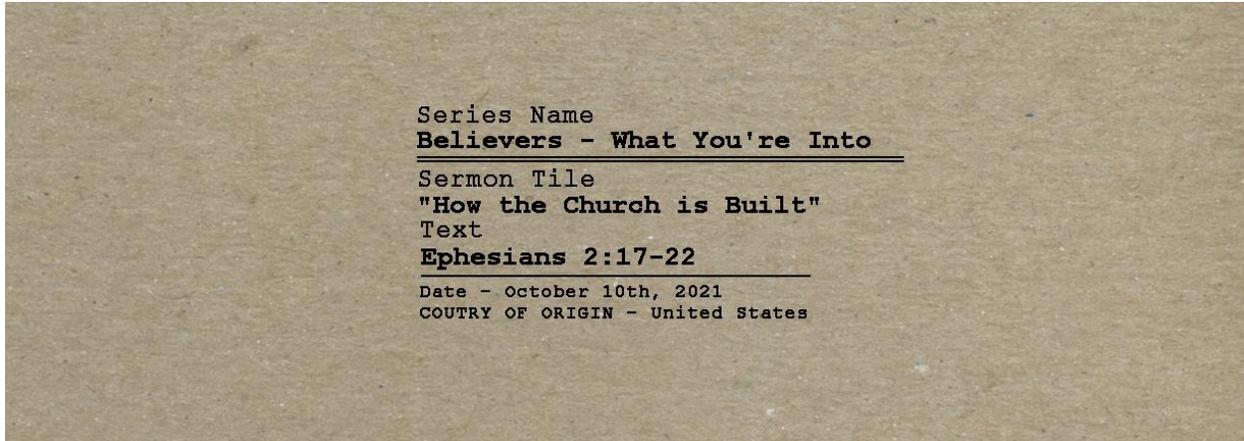


“How the Church is Built”

October 10th, 2021



[Ephesians 2:17-22](#)

And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have 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 members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Video of sermon is available [HERE](#).

Transcript:

Dr. Stewart

We are in Ephesians chapter two. We'll be looking at verse 17 through 22, how the church is built. You know, we're putting a room on our house. Josh is building this room on our house. And he's run into some challenges, especially regarding the foundation. The foundation is critical for your house or this room that we're going to add on. Without it, you can't have a structurally sound building. And so Josh tried very hard to get out of putting in the foundation. He tried to get multiple basement guys who were busy and not interested in our little job. The basement guys use steel plates to hold in the concrete for the foundation. Well, Josh doesn't have steel plates. So he built a wooden form, and he did a pretty good job with it. (Now showing multiple pictures of this work going on) And you notice who's down in the trenches there, your your beloved pastor. Josh is overseeing him here in this job. And they both did a good job. The problem was we had a couple inches of rain. And unbeknownst to Josh, they gave him heavier concrete than what he expected, they gave him this foundation concrete that's much more dense. And so when they poured it, the concrete forms popped and the

concrete came seeping out. So they stopped. They waited for the ground to dry, but it was really wet. And it took a long time. Josh built better forms with more braces. Before he had had a few braces. See the braces right here. And then he beefed up the job. Yeah, a few more braces, they're about every two feet. And so he was really prepared, Josh was ready. Of course, they scheduled the truck back a couple times, on days when it recently rained again, or was raining and they had to cancel again. But eventually, they came, they poured this less dense concrete into the forms, which held and we have a foundation. Now our foundation is a little thicker, you can see it kind of bows out there. It's a little thicker than what we would have liked, but it's still a solid foundation. And we're thankful that Josh did that for us. He did good. pasture did good, too. He helped him.

In our passage, we learn about the construction of the church. And I'm going to go back to review a little bit of what's been said in the passage. We're at verse 17, where it says he came and preached peace. What's the nature of that peace? Well, we're going to review back a little bit through what pastor had done last week, verses 11-16. Let me read that for you first, verse 11-16. And then in a few minutes, we'll go on to the rest of the passage. "Therefore, remember that at one time, you Gentiles in the flesh called 'the uncircumcision', by what is called circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands-remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility."

Pastor told us last weekend who this is address to in verse 11. It's given to Gentiles. And Gentiles were everybody that's not a Jew, right? Everybody else in the face the earth that's not a Jew. So what does that make us here? Are there any Jewish people here? Wow, none, we're all Gentiles. All of us. Verse 12, what were we like? Separated from Christ, not with him, not in him, completely separated. What else? We were alienated. And we were, what to the covenants of God, did we have any promises we could cling to? There were no promises for us, we were strangers to the covenants of promise, none of them applied. And no hope, without God in the world. And it just taking us down the stairs here, we're at a very low place, till you get to verse 13. "But now...you who once were far off", that is the Gentiles, "have been brought near by the blood of Christ". He is brought to himself by his own sacrifice. Through that sacrifice, he became our peace. And we're at peace. Were we at peace before? No. What were our lives like before? Romans tells us we were enemies, at war with God before. Only Christ makes our relationship with God right. He breaks down this wall of separation between Jew and Gentile. What kind of a wall was it, verse 14? A wall of hostility. The hatred existed between Jew and Gentile. He takes away their identity, the Jew with all his outward religion and the Gentile with all of his pagan religion, he makes in the one new man. They are no longer Jew and Gentile. They're a new man. They're a Christian, completely made new. In the process of taking down these walls, he brought peace. So they're not

only neutral towards each other, but they cared about each other. They loved one another. They had a common master and a common purpose in Christ. And verse 16, he reconciles us. That word is in the Greek Apokatallasso. It means, to turn from hostility to friendship. Not only does he take away the hostility, but he brings to us a care, a love for one another and a love for God. There's double barrel reconciliation. There's vertical reconciliation with God and man. And there's horizontal reconciliation between men. All this happens through the cross by Jesus death, he brings men together and he brings them all to God. He destroys their hostility through Jesus's death on the cross. He pointed this out not only for the Jews, but the Gentiles. Our pastor mentioned last week some of the groups besides just Jews and Gentiles: racial differences, Blacks and Whites, Republicans and Democrats, vaxxers and anti-vaxxers, people with gender issues and those who support standard gender roles, those who struggle with same sex attraction and typical church attenders. People of all stripes, all kinds of beliefs, can all be reconciled in Christ. Christ can bring people together with such radically different views. People who are angry at the other side, the gospel miraculously brings peace as we come together under a common head, Jesus Christ. As we trust him and look to Him, our differences fade. We see people in the first century, people of all colors and nationalities and backgrounds, they come together in Acts 2:44-47. Now they were all Jews there. But here's what it was like with all those backgrounds, "And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing them to us all, as any had need." They lived together and pooled their money. They were in a commune. "And day by day, attending the temple together, breaking bread in their homes, they receive their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God, and having favor with all people." They were not at odds with anyone, they loved each other, and they cooperated with each other. God granted them favor with all people. "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." Jesus was building the church through peace.

So how does this happen? Let's look at our passage, Ephesians 2:17-22, "And he 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. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit." Now verse 17, And he, Jesus Christ, preach peace to you who were far off, Gentiles. Anything wrong with that statement, he preached peace to you. Did Jesus, in person, preach peace to the Ephesians? No, he didn't, did he? He wasn't physically present. Paul actually did and other believers did. But it was the Spirit of Jesus in them. Not in person, but it was his Spirit. Acts 5:9 says that it was the Spirit of the Lord that was present. And that Spirit was present in Peter and Paul and the many believers that shared the gospel in Asia. The Book of Acts speaks first about the ministry to the Jews in chapters 2-10. And then it speaks to the gospel going out to the Gentile nations, chapters 11-28. Even during that time, Paul was preaching in Gentile cities, and he would start by going to the synagogue first, and he preached there, to those who are near. And then he preached to those who were far off. The Jews, of course, had the background of the Old Testament. They knew who Jehovah was and

they had some background. He would preach to them first. And then he would preach to the Gentiles. He brought peace to all, as we said, vertically with God and horizontally with people, reconciliation.

So Hendrickson says this, "Christ when lifted up from the earth, drew all men, regardless of blood, or race, to himself. The gospel urging all to receive it, both far away-the gentiles and those nearby-the Jews, who had a knowledge of the one true God." MacArthur says, "He made both groups, Jews (those who were near) and Gentiles (those who were far off), into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall. In Jesus Christ, a Jew is no longer distinct from a Gentile as far as religion is concerned. In fact, in AD 70, the temple was destroyed, true religious Judaism ceased to exist. Not only was the place of sacrifice destroyed, but so were all the genealogical records, of which priestly descent was based." I never thought about that before. It pretty much did Judaism in like. Likewise, a Gentile in Christ is no longer distinct as far as a special condition is concerned. His paganism is gone. His unbelief is gone. His hopelessness is gone. And his godlessness is gone. For those in Christ, the only identity that matters is their identity in him. There is no Jewish or Gentile Christianity, no black or white Christian no male or female Christianity, no slave or free. There's only Christianity. Only one Lord who has only one church. The barrier, the dividing wall that separated the Court of the Gentiles from the rest of the temple, we talked a little bit about this last week, between that court and the court of the Israelites was a sign that read, No Gentile may enter into the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. This physical barrier illustrated the barrier of hostility and hate, that also separated the two groups. And even a Jew who brought a Gentile into the restricted part of the temple risk being put to death. And this actually happened to Paul, he was accused of this in Acts, He had not done so but certain Jews from Asia accused him of taking Trophimus, a Gentile from Ephesus, into the temple. They would have stoned Paul to death had it not been for Roman soldiers who rescued him, Acts 27:27-32.

God had originally separated Jews from Gentiles. He says that in Isaiah 5:1-7 and Matthew 21:33, they were to be separate for the purpose of redeeming both groups. Not for saving the Jews alone. They were not God's chosen people alone. He placed the court of the Gentiles in the temple for the purpose of winning Gentiles to himself. It was meant to be a place of Jewish evangelism of Gentiles, a place of winning proselytes to Judaism and thereby bringing them near. You know what happened in that court, The Court of the Gentiles? It's a famous story in the New Testament. There were people were selling animals for exorbitant rates. And they were cheating people in exchange. And that was in the Gentile court. And Jesus heard about that. Do you remember what he did? He was pretty ticked off, wasn't he? I mean, he went in and he turned over the tables and he made a whip and he chased them out. Do you think Jesus would have been that mad if he cared nothing for the Gentiles? It was the Gentile court. It was meant to bring them to God. And those people were being shysters and taking advantage of the gentiles. That's in Mark 11:17. So the Gentiles court was meant to be a place of witness. God always had an eye towards building the church through saving men, but men, not so much. They were more about what they could get for themselves, right?

Verse 18, "For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father." Who is who is the him there in verse 18? It's Jesus, Jesus Christ. The Jews had access to the Holy of Holies once a year. The Gentiles had access to the Holy of Holies how often? Never, they had no access to the Holy of Holies. But with Jesus's death on the cross for us, the moment he died, the veil of the curtain was torn from top to bottom. Do you know how thick the curtain is? Like six to eight inches! It is an immensely thick curtain. It was torn how? From from top to bottom. Now how does that happen? It didn't happen by people. God tore that barrier when Jesus died on the cross. Hebrews 9:12, says, "He, Jesus Christ, entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption." Then Hebrews 9:24, "For Christ has entered...into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf." In God's very presence, he comes before him. And Hebrews 9:26 says, "...he has appeared once for all...to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." We have access to the Father through Jesus sacrifice for us. He's our high priest, we can come to God not by our own work, but because of his perfect work, what he's done for us, we have access. Hebrews 4:16, "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." You know as I was reading this, I'm thinking, it's been a hard week. It's been a really hard week. We think about Sis and about the fact that she's in the hospital. We think about people that we've lost this last week to Covid. And we have access to the throne of grace, we need to be going to the throne of grace, it's a time of need! And he provided mercy and grace to help in times of need. I'm so thankful for the that. As we come, we come indwelt with the same Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God. And every believer in the kingdom has this same spirit, one spirit, one Lord, one Father. Wait a minute, The Spirit, The Son and The Father, that's the Trinity, right? All in verse 18. All active and bringing us to God, they all assist in bringing us into this intimate relationship with God. Those who are once enemies and rebels against God can now come to him as their Father, knowing that he will no longer condemn, but he will forgive and bless them.

Verse 19 says, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens." There's been a radical transformation. He piles up three metaphors in this next couple of verses to demonstrate our identity in Christ. In verse 19, what's the first metaphor that he gives us? You are fellow citizens. You were in the world. But now you're in the kingdom. You're citizens of the kingdom. You were a slave under the rule of Satan, who's the prince of darkness, but now you have a new king. You've been translated in the kingdom of light. You have an eternal kingdom that you're part of. Before, you were headed for destruction and outer darkness, but now the eternal kingdom. Now you're a servant of the king as a citizen of his kingdom, headed for heaven to worship and to be with God forever. You know, there are rights and privileges and responsibilities that go with our citizenship. We'll talk a little bit more about that. The kingdom is not meant to be static, but it's meant to be dynamic. And what I mean by that is we're not stuck in one place, but we're moving forward. It's meant to be growing. The second metaphor in verse 19, you're a member of the family, the household of God, a part of the family. Jesus calls you a brother. You have a Father in heaven, you're inhabited by the Holy Spirit. You were an enemy, but now he calls you his friend, John 15:15. You know, that struck me once, I was listening to a song that said that very thing, Jesus calls us his friends. And it's pretty amazing that the God of the universe calls me his friend. I have a hard time getting over

that. It's amazing! He spoke the world into existence. And he goes beyond that! He doesn't only call you a friend, but he calls you "my child", you're my child. John 1:12, "he gave the right to become children of God." We're family. We have the same Father. Paul just made that point in verse 18. We have access to the Father, we're adopted children it says in Ephesians 1:5. The church is made up of adopted brothers and sisters, we have responsibilities in the family, each fulfilling his role, bringing glory to the Father, Ephesians 5:1. 1 Timothy 5:1-2 Paul says, we should treat one another like family. How do you treat your brothers and sisters in the church? Is it like family? MacArthur says, We've identified ourselves with his son by faith. God now sees us and treats us exactly as he sees and treats his son, with infinite love. Because the father cannot give anything but his best to the son, he cannot give anything but his best to those who are in his son. For that reason, he's not ashamed to call them brothers. You have rights and privileges and responsibilities as his child. Our first goal is we're supposed to look like somebody. You know, we're told that the Romans 8:29. Who are we supposed to look like? Christ, who was our brother, our Savior. We're to look like Jesus, to take on a little more of his characteristics, of what he's like. We're supposed to be like that. To give glory to God, to praise him for his marvelous work and tell of his magnificence. Now we're going to do that in a little bit. We're going to sing again, and you get to sing about the wonder, the magnificence of what God's done for us.

Verse 20, we're "built on a foundation of the apostles and prophets", Christ Jesus being in the cornerstone. It's a better foundation than the one I showed you. It's stronger and better. Far better. Now we shift to this last metaphor, verse 20, and that's this foundation. It's the foundation of the apostles and prophets. At first glance, does that seem like it's accomplished by human effort? Humans are involved. And clearly, they helped build the church. But what would their efforts be without the Holy Spirit, who gave them their strength, that gave them boldness to preach, gave them Christ in their heart, renovate and renewed their heart, their efforts would be is nothing without the Holy Spirit. So though God has used men in building this foundation, the center is Christ. He's the orienting piece. We know for the apostles, Peter and Paul and James, were not Old Testament prophets that he speaks out here. It's New Testament prophets, men gifted by the Holy Spirit that are spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12:10. They spoke, at the time, new revelation needed to complete scripture. Primarily this seem to be by the apostles, apparently there were others but no matter who spoke, the prophecies are true. God can't lie. And it's completely consistent with the Word of God. It is the word of God that we have. There are no new prophets. As the church started in Acts we're given characteristics of the church. The first is that they were devoted to the apostles teaching. That's acts 2:42. They were people of the Book. The church stands or falls, David Platt says, based on its faithfulness to God's Word. We will cease to exist and be ineffective unless we're founded here. If we don't find our foundation here, in this book. Thank God for bold men who are moved by the Spirit, who preach the word in the past and those who continue to preach today. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone. The cornerstone is the largest stone, set on a corner with extensions that go out to two primary walls. MacArthur says this stone must be strong enough to support the structure, it has to be precisely laid because every other part of the structure is oriented to it. The cornerstone was support, the orientor and makes sure the walls are true and perfectly straight

throughout, and the unifier of the entire building. That's what Jesus Christ is to us in God's building. That's what he is for his kingdom. That's what he is for his family.

Verse 21, "in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord." The whole structure being joined together speaks of God's sovereignty. God's building his church with preciseness and intentionality. He chooses each stone. Nobody, nobody is here by mistake. Everybody was put here by Christ in relation to one another. You're put here next to the person that you're next to for God's purpose, he sovereignly did this. The various relationships we have in our local church body are his work. We are spoken of in 1 Peter 2:5, "you yourselves like living stones", we're stones placed in the body, on the foundation, "are being built up a spiritual house" and the cornerstone is living. The stones are living, the structure is alive. We're alive but not free to do whatever we want. We must live according to the will of the cornerstone, who is God. We're not our own, we're bought with a price. Therefore we're to glorify God with our bodies. Hendrickson says about verse 21, the apostle adds, in whom the entire building is harmoniously fitted, it's fitted together in harmony, growing into a holy temple in the Lord. We now learned that Christ, in addition to being the principal of the church's stability and direction, is the principal of its growth. We grow from the cornerstone, from our vital union with him, the entire building is growing, the stones are growing, more stones are being added. There's nothing static about the edifice. It's a living building, consisting of living stones, who are believers. Since each living stone makes his own contribution to the growth and beauty of the building, as harmoniously fitted together. It's just the way God put us together, he did it because he chose to do it that way. He wanted it this way, it is holy. It's cleansed and consecrated because of the blood and Spirit of Christ.

Notice that the building is growing as more people are added to the church, the stones themselves grow as they are in intimate union with Christ and the body. The building is a holy temple and each believer is a temple of the Holy Spirit so there is individual indwelling of each of us and there's an indwelling of this local church body and there's an indwelling of the church, corporate universal. All our true. There is a universal church in view which is made up of millions of small local churches. A temple spoken of in verse 22 would bring to mind to many of the Ephesians the Temple of Artemis. It is one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. People probably traveled thousands of miles to see the Temple of Artemis. The Jews may bring to mind their own temple, the ancient Jewish temple with all its splendor. Here's what Paul says about that in Acts 17:24, "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man." It's not about the structure. Paul's ministry to the Ephesians, his preaching had collided head on with the cult of the goddess Artemis, who would cease to command respect. And his address stirred up a riot so filled with excitement that for two hours the mob sat and chanted, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. That's in Acts 19:23-41 if you want to read that.

In verses 20-22, Paul's contrasting the spiritual building of the church with the sanctuary of the Temple of Artemis, where the statue of the goddess was physically present, contrast physical to spiritual. David Platt says this, For the Jews, God had promised to dwell on the inner sanctuary, the temple. Now his special presence is not

limited to a place or a building. Thank God. Now God's presence is spread worldwide, wherever people who believe in Christ are. His presence moves through the world. It comes together in a special way as we gather together as a body, though, doesn't it? But his presence is in the world, through people who believe. Ephesians, your dwelling places his home. A dwelling indicates permanence and beauty and close fellowship and protection and love, right there in the church. It's broad and wide, able to accommodate any who come to Christ, rich, poor, slave or free, any race, any gender, Jewish or Gentile, all who come because God has broken down the dividing wall, abolishing it through the cross of Christ, by the Holy Spirit. We'll see at the end of verse 22, the Holy Spirit who indwells the body, it's the inhabiting place of God, churches are meant to be that.

So I'm going to ask you a few practical questions, because I neglected to do that last time. But I'm learning and growing, so I want to do that now. So this is from the Christ Centered Commentary. How should we view our brothers and sisters? Are they important? Are they dispensable? How should we view them? What do you think? (someone answers) He said, "consider their own interests of more importance than your own. (someone else answers) "If it's a house, you can't just knock out a few bricks and have it remain a house." Did you have any bricks in mind? (laughter) That's good. We need one another. We need our time and talent and treasure and love and our resources and encouragement and we need the rebuke of each other. We need that as a body. We live the Christian life together as you know, we're a multi ethnic temple, centered in Christ. You're like...Heartland, a multi ethnic temple? Isn't? You know how many continents have been represented here over the years? Five out of seven. There's four here today.

You know, there are three metaphors, kingdom citizens, household of God, spiritual temple, used in this passage. Of these metaphors, none are about God using isolated Christians, but instead all speak about the church, the body and the many members. This passage is "in your face western individualism". Do we have that here? Do you see that in our society, western individualism? But to be separate from the church is to say, I want to be a stone apart from a building, a son and daughter separated from my family, a refugee away from my country. Many people treat the church as something that is unnecessary, unimportant, even a hindrance to doing great things for God. To believe this is making yourself superior to others not needing the church....I felt I could do more apart from the church...I hopped around visiting different churches but did not have community. That is not God's design for Christians. That's not God's design for believers. We're not meant to be lone wolf Christians. Some think the church is fine for others, but don't feel the need to take fellowship seriously. The New Testament positions it as our fundamental identity. This is our identity as a body. As you read through the New Testament, you don't ever see people who are apart from a church there. It's understood as you read it, people are part of a body. It's our fundamental identity. But people today go on their own. Belonging to a local church should be more important than where you go to school, where you go to work or what club you belong to. If we're a part from community, we're not following the New Testament pattern. We're not helping ourselves. It's not good to be apart from the oversight of the shepherds, the accountability and support of other believers, brothers and sisters. What do you think?

Do you think that's true? This relationship is so important. It's assumed, like we said in the New Testament, no lone wolf believers. We need the body. It's good to be here.

So how do we build the church? Acts 2:42 told us about the apostles doctrine, being a man or a woman of the Book, reading it, memorizing it, studying it, meditating on it. They talk about four things in that passage. The word talks about fellowship, talks about prayer, talks about worship and it talks about the breaking of bread. All those things are essential. These things grow us. How do we add more stones to the church? How does that happen? (someone answers-It's by preaching the gospel.) That's what we're doing right now. That's what Peter was doing in the New Testament, he was preaching the gospel. In 1 Peter 2:9 he says, "a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." And that's us, we're to proclaim or to tell other people about this, we're to share our faith. You know, this last week, I've changed my strategy in talking to some people about COVID. I used to use persuasion by saying, I'm trying to educate you but now I've gone to this, Please!! Please get vaccinated! I see people dying around me that I love. Please! Now, if I do that about a virus that sometimes kills, how much more should we be motivated over people's eternal soul? Share your faith! Please! Build the church in all these ways, through the word, through prayer, through fellowship, through sharing your faith, through worship. Let's pray.

Thank you, Lord, for this passage. We are living in a difficult time right now. We pray and we thank you that you are over all of this. We think of Sis and we pray that you'd be with her, help her to know your presence. We pray that you'd help to heal her. Pray that you'd be with her family, help to strengthen them, help them to know your presence. Help them to know that you understand suffering, having suffered greatly for us on the cross. Lord, we're thankful for who you are, that you walk with us through these things. Be with us as we consider building the church, help us to hold it precious. Help us to gather together as a body, for you, for your glory, that we can honor and give glory back to you. Be with us now as we sing about our foundation. In Jesus name. Amen.