

Moments *for* You

Volume 69, Number 3

Theme: Building



BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

While this issue of *Moments For You* is being distributed, we are in the process of moving to a new facility. This new building is truly a blessing from the Lord, received at just the right time. Our previous location has ranged somewhere between “cozy” and “cramped” for a while, so having more space creates a much-needed buffer for expanded ministry.

As we’ve been planning and preparing for the past two years, I’ve also been looking back with thanksgiving at this ministry’s foundation. The love for Christ and heart for the gospel instilled by our founders and staff have positioned us to carry on this important work of sending the good news of Jesus into the world.

The original editor of this publication and first president of Moments With The Book, Donald T. Johnson, delivered the following message in the days before his passing. Enjoy this short excerpt, and then be sure to visit mwtb.org/building to be blessed by the full message:

Where are our affections centered? What comes first in our thoughts? With David his affections were set toward the house of his God. That’s where there was no lack of love; in fact, there was first love. It had first place. He was aware of the greatness and goodness of God whom he had known as his Shepherd. He had experienced many trials; he had gone through failures. But he had been the recipient of the ministry and grace of a loving God. And therefore David would not withhold any effort to fulfill what would please Him.

The Lord is building His church today. How good it is if our affections

are set toward what He is doing. It all begins in the heart, does it not? If our heart is right with Him, all will flow in a proper direction to build up. If we are not building up, I do believe we are tearing down. I don’t think there is any such thing as standing still in the testimony for our Lord. Let us search our hearts and ask, “Am I building, or not?”

With the passing of our senior founder, the role of editor was picked up by Tim Johnson, as he continued his work of more than three decades to publish the truth of God’s word. Of the many messages that Tim had a hand in writing and editing, his favorite is the tract which speaks of the hope of the Rapture. The full message is available in tract form at mwtb.org/the-rapture

The greatest day of the believer’s existence will be realized when he sees Jesus face to face at the Rapture (Revelation 22:4). He will be changed to be like Christ (1 John 3:1-3), forever free from sin and all its effects (Revelation 21:4). ... Will the Rapture be the greatest day of your existence, or will it be the beginning of unspeakable horror and suffering for all eternity? It all depends on whether or not you believe on God’s Son (John 3:36). The most important matter you need to take care of is not making a will, or building an underground shelter, but preparing to meet God by taking His salvation freely offered to you now.

I trust that you will be blessed by the following articles on the theme of “building.” We thank the Lord for the prayers and partnership of His people which have sustained this ministry, and ask that you pray with us for His continued guidance as we point needy souls to the only Savior.

—T. Don Johnson

FIRM FOUNDATION

In 1174 the Italian architect Bonnano Pisano began work on what would become his most famous project: an eight-story bell tower in the city of Pisa. There was just one “little” problem: builders quickly discovered that the soil was much softer than they had anticipated, and the foundation was far too shallow to adequately hold the structure! Before long it began to tilt ... and it continued to tilt ... until finally the architect and the builders realized that nothing could be done to make the Leaning Tower of Pisa straight again.

In Matthew 7:24-27, as Jesus comes to the end of the most famous sermon ever preached, He tells us that in order to have a life that lasts, our foundation must be anchored to the solid rock: *“Everyone then who hears these words of Mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”*

TWO BUILDERS

We’re introduced in this story to two different men. By all appearances, they may have looked the same, had identical materials, used the same tools, and persevered until their homes were finished. All of us are building—for to live is to build. Our desires, thoughts, attitudes, actions and words are building blocks. The question becomes: Are you building to last or to crash?

TWO HOUSES

From the outside, both homes appeared to be well-built, but there’s a huge difference between them. Here’s the point. The difference between two lives is not always obvious, at first. The house on the sand may have started to shift even before the storm came. Gaps likely appeared in the walls as the timbers slipped. The owner probably patched up the holes, only to see more appear, even as the outside appeared to be fine. That’s a picture of people who don’t have a solid foundation. Great gaps and hideous holes show up and are often filled with that which doesn’t satisfy but gives the appearance that all is well.

TWO FOUNDATIONS

The main difference between the two builders is that only one took the time and determination to dig down to the solid rock and anchor his abode to that which would not move. All of this work was out of sight, but necessary. The contrast is brought out more strongly in Luke 6:48 where we read that the wise man “dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock.” The rock is Christ: “For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11).

SAME STORM

Notice that adversity comes from above (the rain fell), and from below (the floods came), and from all sides (the winds blew). Problems drench us like driving rain. Stress surrounds us like rising flood waters and pressures pound us like whipping hurricane-force winds.

Observe also that the same storm hits both houses. No individual is immune from adversity. Spurgeon writes, “Whether your religion be true or not, it will be tried.” Storms

can serve as wake-up calls, can't they? Storms will come to test the faithful to see what we're really made of.

TWO DESTINIES

While hard times come in this life, nothing will compare to what is to come in the future for those who do not follow Christ: "the ruin of that house was great" (Luke 6:49). The crash is great because it results in eternal separation and everlasting torment.

Now, let's bring this all together to get at the main point of the parable. Both builders had the privilege of hearing the words of Jesus. The only difference between them is that while both listened to the words of Jesus, only one lived them out. The wise man heard and heeded the word of God. If you want your life to last, then listen to Jesus and live what He says.

HOW TO BE WISE

Are you putting yourself in a position to continually hear God's word by reading the Bible daily? Are you committed to regular participation in a Bible-teaching church? Are you plugged into a small group? It's hard to live what you haven't learned.

We're all in danger of doing a lot of listening but not so much living out what we hear. Could it be that some of us are not Christians, even though we think we are? 2 Corinthians 13:5 says, "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!"

Some of us are too soft and too shallow. It's time to go deep. You can't really tell from looking at someone how deep their roots are but you can tell by what happens when horrible things come. Some of you will weather these storms because

you have wisely built your life on the Lord Jesus Christ. Others of you will compromise and capsize. Some of you know you are on shaky ground and you're ready to be anchored to the Rock.

It's time to take His hand and get to know the Lord Jesus Christ. Confess His name and turn from wickedness. When you do, the Lord says, "I know My own and My own know Me" (John 10:14). And you will be cemented to God's solid foundation that will always stand firm. —Brian Bill, condensed

BUILDING WALLS

The Jewish people had been in captivity for seventy years in Babylon, but in the year 530 B.C. the power of the Babylonian Empire was broken by the power of Persia, and the king of Persia encouraged the Jewish remnant to return to their own country and to the city of Jerusalem. The Persian king had no power to send them reinforcements, and so for more than ninety years after the first Jews returned, the walls of Jerusalem remained desolate and the people of God lived in affliction and shame.

It was at this juncture, in the year 445 B.C., that God spoke to Nehemiah, and called him to serve the Lord in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. Let's look at the immense spiritual lessons for all of us in Nehemiah's life.

NEHEMIAH'S PREPARATION

One day Nehemiah's brother and some other Jews returned from a brief visit to Jerusalem and reported to Nehemiah the situation there. The story of failure, set against his own knowledge of God's real purpose for the people in Jerusalem, changed this man's whole outlook on life. He sat down and he wept, and he mourned, and he fasted, and he prayed. Ever since, the Lord's people

have found that their work for God has only begun when they have wept and mourned and fasted and prayed over the conditions as they really are.

It was after Nehemiah's weeping that he began working. It was after his despair that there came determination. If we would mourn over the ruin that exists, we would find ourselves cast in utter dependence upon our God. That was Nehemiah's secret and that is the beginning of all Christian work.

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER

When we have a vision of ruin and brokenness and need, we are tempted to say, "We're helpless to do anything about it." Observe carefully, now, Nehemiah's prayer in chapter 1, verses 4-11. Quite clearly, this was a man who had fed his soul on the word of God. His prayer in this chapter is based on God's revelation of Himself, and that kind of prayer can never fail.

Nehemiah's prayer moved on to confession. He included himself in the confession of the sins of his people, and in acknowledgment that they had not obeyed God, and that their troubles were the result of their own disobedience.

Notice also that this prayer was rooted in the past. Nehemiah looked back hundreds and hundreds of years, and dared to remind God of the great deliverance from Egypt, the protection of the blood, the successful, triumphant journey into the land of blessing and victory. He dared to remind God of the covenant that God had given to His people.

When we pray, we can look back to when Jesus shed His blood and died and rose from a tomb and ascended into Heaven. Certainly He did not do all that to leave us living as we are today, or to leave our churches weak and inadequate in their impact and

insufficient in their witness. Take a long look at the cross and the blood flowing from His side, and then you will know something about this effective way of praying.

NEHEMIAH'S PURPOSE

Notice Nehemiah's determination of purpose as he ended his prayer: "give success to Your servant today" (1:11). Can you picture Nehemiah as he rose from his knees and took a deep breath and went into the presence of the king? He started the task. He had the ear of the king, and thanks to God he had obtained favor from the king. Nehemiah, firm in his purpose, went out in the power of God and set about the task.

The principles of Christian service are just the same today. We are prepared to serve the Lord only by sacrifice. We are fit for the work of God only when we have wept over it, prayed about it, and then we are enabled by Him to tackle the job that needs to be done.

There is a wall to be built around your soul. There is a wall of testimony to be built around your church. There is a wall of witness to be built in all the world. No matter which of these walls you are burdened about building, you will discover that there is no winning without warfare; there is no opportunity without opposition; there is no victory without vigilance. For whenever the people of God say, "Let us arise and build," Satan says, "Let me arise and oppose."

May God give to us hearts that bleed, eyes that are wide open to see, minds that are clear to interpret God's purpose, wills that are obedient, and a determination that is utterly unflinching as we set about the tasks He would have us to do.

—Condensed from *Victorious Christian Service: Studies in the book of Nehemiah* by Alan Redpath

BUILDING AND BEING BUILT

"... Building yourselves up in your most holy faith ..." (Jude 20).

According to the New Testament, each Christian is a dwelling place of God, and their responsibility is to build themselves up into a temple worthy of divine habitation. How is this accomplished?

THE FOUNDATION

The first thing about any structure is the foundation. Paul was adamant that the only foundation upon which a person could be built up into holy character is Jesus Christ. "No one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). He is the basis of all our certainty. He is the anchor for all our hopes. The structure of our character should rest on Him, solid and unshakable.

SELF-EDIFICATION

Once we have connected ourselves to the Foundation through a personal act of faith, we are in a position to draw all power from Him, and to see in Him all the characteristics that make Him the pattern for building our lives. Then it's time to build.

Building requires continuous, enduring work. You can't build a house in half an hour. There must be persistent, continuous, lifelong effort if we are to be built up and shaped into His likeness. There should be an orderly progression, which is the natural result of new life in Christ. Progress must be made despite strong opposition, both from without and from within our own treacherous selves.

Is the notion of progress part of your working belief? Are you growing, fighting, running, building yourselves up more and more in your holy faith? I wonder how many of us have ever spent a quiet hour trying to

set clearly before ourselves what we want to make of ourselves and how we mean to go about it. If a person works as their own architect and has a very hazy idea of what they mean to build, they won't build anything worth the trouble.

Friend, if you're going to build, have a plan, and let the plan be the likeness of Jesus Christ! And then, with the exercise of continuous faith which connects you to the foundation, plus continuous dedication, and through the power of the Spirit, you will be built "into a dwelling place for God" (Ephesians 2:22).

MUTUAL EDIFICATION

There's nothing that will make a person more like Christ, than throwing themselves into the service of their fellow believers. "Building up the body of Christ" is a duty that no Christian can neglect (Ephesians 4:12).

The building that results from mutual edification is represented in Scripture not as the combination of many little shrines (each individual), but as one great temple for the Lord (Ephesians 2:21). That temple grows in two ways, both of which include responsibilities for us as believers. First, it grows by the addition of new stones. And so every Christian must seek to gather into the fold those who are wandering far away, so they can be set upon the sure foundation. It also grows also by the individual increase of each member in Christ-like characteristics. Let us work earnestly for the advancement of our brothers and sisters, and for the unity of God's Church.

DIVINE EDIFICATION

When the Apostle Paul spoke to the elders of the church of Ephesus, he said that God was able "to build you up" (Acts 20:32). When he wrote to the Corinthians, he said, "You are

God's ... building" (1 Corinthians 3:9). And so, far above all our effort, we turn our attention to the divine master builder, God Himself.

We have to base all our efforts on this deeper truth: it is God who builds us into a temple suitable for Himself, and then comes to dwell in the temple He has built. So let us keep our hearts and minds expectant of and open to the Spirit's influences. Let us be sure that we are using all the power that God gives us. His work doesn't replace mine. My work is to make use of His. The two thoughts are not contradictory. Paul said, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you" (Philippians 2:12-13).

If God is the builder, then boundless hope should be ours. If we only had our own resources to fall back on, no one could look at their own character, after all their efforts to improve it, without being struck by a sense of despair. But with God as the architect and the builder, we are entitled to cherish endless hope and quiet confidence that we, even we, will be built up into a dwelling place of God through the Spirit.

—Alexander Maclaren, adapted

BUILDING HIS CHURCH

"On this rock I will build My church"
(Matthew 16:18).

As the disciples walked along the dusty roads of Caesarea Philippi, they were in a kind of exile. The leaders, as well as the people of Israel, had rejected them. The Jews had also rejected the disciples' message and their leader, the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, it was apparent by now that some of the Jews wanted Jesus dead.

The disciples knew that He was the Messiah and the confession of Peter in Matthew 16:16, "You are the

Christ, the Son of the living God," really summed up what they had all come to know by the revelation of God. They were convinced that this was God in human flesh, God the Son and indeed the Messiah, the anointed King, the promised one. But they seemed to be alone in that conviction. Few people identified with it and affirmed it. Things looked very bleak and very discouraging.

They were struggling with the fact that they had made a major investment of their life in something that looked like it wasn't going to be what they wanted it to be. And so He says to them, "I will build My church," as if to say, "I know it doesn't look very hopeful, I know the plan isn't unfolding the way you thought it would, but I will build My church and nothing is going to stand in its way."

All of this means that *we're* not building the church. We are certainly endeavoring to be holy and faithful and obedient so that God can do His work and we may have the privilege of being instruments in it. But against all the opposition of worldly wisdom and all the assistance of our own "wisdom," against all ineptitude and indifference and apathy and apostasy, the true church will be built. If God's going to do it, it can't be stopped.

Christ builds His church, His redeemed assembly, through all of redemptive history on one premise: the articulation of the truth of divine revelation. Ephesians 2:20 says the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone."

The church is not built on clever technique. It's not built on manipulation. It's not built on a strategic marketing plan. The church will be built on those who proclaim God's truth, those who teach the apostles' doctrine

found in the word of God. The Lord will build His church on those who unashamedly proclaim Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God.

All God wants out of us is the recognition of what we've been called to do: to preach the unadulterated crystal-clear gospel of Christ and then to tell people their consequence in believing and not believing. We are here to tell them there is a Kingdom and it has a door and here's how you enter it. We have a tremendous responsibility. The Lord will build His church; it will be what He wants it to be. It's going to be complete. No one is going to slip through the cracks. And He's asked us to participate in it and to be partners with Him in opening the door and letting His own in.

—John MacArthur, condensed

BUILDING TOWERS

"Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves" (Genesis 11:4).

Think of it! A tower that reaches to the heavens. And we thought that we had big ambitions. No one ever tried to do anything like this before or since. This was the greatest building program of the ancient world. But the tower they started was stopped by God, and it eventually fell to the ground.

We too are massive tower-builders. We're ladder-climbers, control freaks, estate-builders, and compulsive over-committers. We're looking for love and pleasure and power and purpose and meaning in all the wrong places. We build towers that crumble before our eyes and we wonder what went wrong. We're too busy building our kingdoms to seek first the Kingdom of God. No wonder we're frazzled, tired, nervous, uptight, jumpy, irritable,

easily distracted, and easily seduced by money, sex and power.

The spirit of Babel is not just out there, it's inside all of us all the time. It is very easy to start building "towers" in our own strength and for our own glory. And the tricky part is this: you can't tell by looking at the tower why it was built. Only the Lord knows the thoughts of the heart. So while we may appear to have everything in order because we are happy and busy and successful, God may know that our towers need to come crumbling to the ground.

The people said, "Come, let us build." But Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). If you are tired of building castles in the sand only to see them washed away by the tides of life, come to Jesus. If you are weary of trying (and failing) to be the master of your circumstances, come to Jesus. If you are burdened with the pressure of trying to be all things to all people all the time, and if you fail to meet your own expectations, much less anyone else's, come to Jesus. If you are worn out from the fruitless search for power and prestige, come to Jesus.

Here is a word for frustrated tower-builders everywhere. If you are tired of your life and want something better, come to Jesus. All that hungry hearts seek is found in Him. By His death on the cross our sins are forgiven. By His resurrection we gain new life. Do you know Him? Has your heart been changed by His mighty power? If you are tired of building towers that fall to the ground, come to Jesus. He's the firm foundation, the cornerstone that can never be shaken. Build your life on Jesus Christ and you will never be disappointed. Amen.

—Ray Pritchard, condensed