

UNLESS THE LORD BUILD THE HOUSE...

King David is one of the superstars of the Old Testament.

Every schoolchild knows the story of how he slew the giant Goliath.

Under David's leadership Israel grew from twelve beleaguered tribes who were often at war with one another into a rich and powerful empire.

To future Israelites David's name would always be associated with Israel's finest hour and generations of Israelites would imagine that when Messiah came, he would be a king like David who would restore Israel to a position of power and influence in the world.

Among contemporary Zionists, by the way, that vision survives albeit in a modified form.

When Jesus' Apostles asked him just before He ascended into heaven: "*Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?*"—the kind of kingdom they had in mind was one like David's.

David's name was known even to the angels of God; Gabriel mentioned it when he announced the good news of the Savior's birth to the shepherds outside Bethlehem.

David was to Israel what George Washington and Abraham Lincoln combined are to America.

But David was not without his faults—and they were grievous faults indeed.

He married several wives and kept numerous concubines in spite of God's desire that marriage should consist of a lifelong relationship between one man and one woman.

Not satisfied with a large harem, David allowed his lust for Bathsheba, the wife of a trusted and loyal officer in David's army, to lead him into coveting, deceitfulness, adultery, and finally, murder.

David's outrageous behavior seriously tarnished his reign and later led to his son, Absalom leading a rebellion against him which very nearly toppled his throne.

In sum, David was a man of heroic stature but deeply flawed character.

He was a fearless warrior, a superb military commander, a shrewd politician and a devout man of God, but was also a liar, an adulterer and a murderer.

Despite all his sins, however, David was a man of faith.

When Nathan the prophet denounced him to his face for his sin against Bathsheba and her husband Uriah, David did not get defensive like Saul or angry like Ahaz or petulant like Ahab: he repented to the depths of his soul over his sins.

Listen to the words which poured forth from his heart: *“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love...blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me...Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”*

This is true repentance: confessing the evil that abides in our hearts and recognizing that we are without excuse before God and utterly dependent upon His mercy.

It is the place we all need to be: on our knees before God, begging for mercy.

In today's *Old Testament* lesson, we hear of an incident that occurred when David was at the height of his power.

After leading the armies of Israel to victory after victory over their enemies, he seized the city of Jerusalem and made it the capital of his empire.

Ensclosed on his throne there, David decided that he would build a temple—---a “house”—for God in Jerusalem.

He would glorify Yahweh among the nations by raising up for Him a magnificent dwelling where he could come to dwell with His people.

He announced his plan to Nathan, the prophet, and that very night the Lord instructed Nathan to tell David: *Your job is not to build a house for me. On the contrary, I will build a house **for You!***

Now these few words imply a very important truth: all the things a man builds will fall down sooner or later, but what the Lord builds, stands forever.

My father grew up on a dirt-poor farm in southwest Missouri.

He was ashamed of his humble origins and was determined to leave them behind and make something out of himself.

He went to dental school, lived abroad for awhile and then returned to Joplin, Missouri, not far from where he had been raised.

He bought a large house with seven acres of grounds to raise his family.

He spent every Saturday and Sunday working along with my older brother and me to turn our home into a beautiful estate.

He planted hedges and flowers to create separate lawns and gardens.

He installed an underground sprinkler system so that the lawns would continue to stay green through the long droughts that regularly come to that part of the country.

My brother and I spent most of our childhood mowing the grass, trimming the hedges, painting the fences and weeding the gardens.

When a tornado tore the roof off a barn in the back of our property my Dad had it rebuilt with concrete block walls and steel girders in the roof in case another tornado came along.

He ultimately succeeded in creating one of the most beautiful estates in Joplin, Missouri.

(By the way: it's Missouri-ah, not Missouri-ee.)

Seven years ago—about 48 years after my Dad died—I went to my 60th high school reunion and while I was there I drove out to take a look at my childhood home.

The place was a shambles.

The hedges had either died or gone wild, the sprinkler system had rusted out, the lawn looked like a cow pasture, the fences were collapsing and the only flowers were dandelions.

The entire front porch had rotted off and been replaced with a ladder you had to climb up to get to the front door.

The formerly beautiful estate had gone to pot and was barely worth the land it sat on.

All I could think was that sooner or later everything man builds falls down.

It all started with the tower of Babel, which God destroyed and it continued with Solomon's temple, which Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon destroyed.

Later on, Babylon—one of the seven wonders of the ancient world—with walls thirty feet thick and one hundred feet high fell into ruin..

Today where it once stood there is a swamp which Saddam Hussein tried to reclaim, but had to eventually abandon.

Then there was Herod the Great's temple which the Romans tore down stone by stone and threw into the valley of Gehena, the garbage dump of Jerusalem.

And so it went throughout history, right up to September 11, 2001, when two great towers that symbolized the economic and political strength of the most powerful nation in the world were brought down by a handful of determined enemies.

What man builds, always falls down, sooner or later.

David wanted to build a house for the Lord to dwell in.

But God, knowing that whatever David built would one day fall down, said, *"No, but I will build you a house, a house not made with human hands—a house in which man may dwell forever!"*

And what is this "house of God"—a house in which man can live eternally?

Is it this church?

This church is God's house, and there are many more like it.

But in spite of Dave Bell's best efforts, this church will one day fall down too.

As long as people worship here this church is a house of God, but it is not THE eternal “house of God.”

The true house—the temple of God—is not a physical structure like this at all: it is a *person*.

A person who is both the “son of David” and the son of God, whose throne and kingdom will last forever.

He is the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, who said of himself: *“Destroy this temple and I will raise it up again in three days.”*

The crucified, resurrected and ascended Christ is our temple, our dwelling.

It is Christ and Christ alone in Whom God came to dwell with man.

If we live in Him, we live forever, for he is a temple which will never fall down.

And how do we dwell in the temple of Christ?

Simply through faith that He died for our sins and rose again for our salvation.

As long as we believe that, we live in Him and He lives in us and one day, after we leave this body behind, we will dwell in the eternal house he has built for us in the heavenly realms.

Christ is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and end, the first and last of all things.

He is the cornerstone of our faith, the capstone of the temple, and the foundation of our love.

Christ is the solid rock of our salvation upon which a church must be built or it will surely fall.

We can see evidence for this all around us.

Not only individual churches, but entire denominations are shrinking because they have abandoned the Christ of the Scriptures and replaced Him with a god who is more “culture friendly” and congenial to their way of thinking.

Instead of clinging to the Word of God, they are seeking the approval of men.

But if a church is built upon any foundation other than the Rock of Ages, it must fall with a great crash.

At the end of the *Book of Revelation*, John is allowed to see the New Jerusalem—the City of God—a city not made with human hands, in which the saints dwell eternally.

He reports: *“I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.”*

The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.” (Revelation 21:22-23)

King Solomon, the son of David’s body and the builder of the greatest physical temple of antiquity wrote: *“Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain.” (Psalm 127:1)*

What man builds must fall down, but what the Lord builds lasts forever.

Amen.

