

NOTES FOR SPEAKING

Meeting: Freshwaters Christian Fellowship 10.30am

Date & Time: 11th December 2011

Title: Building God's Kingdom

Introduction

As we continue to pray and to make preparations for 'Crossing Over' we need to guard our hearts – to ensure that 'the main thing is the main thing'. If Satan does not manage to block a move of God then he will try and corrupt it by influencing the weakest link – and in a competition between God and us – guess who is the weakest link – yes us!

We declare that God's purposes will not be blocked or corrupted because we are going to ensure that our motives are right, that our focus is right and that they remain right over coming weeks and years.

Solomon's Temple

Now I have a confession to make, I have always had a bit of a soft spot for Solomon's temple. When you look at the details of its design and construction it takes your breath away. There was no doubt that this was a beautiful building built to glorify God – let's just read some of the account:-

2 Chron 3. That's just the building, then **chapter 4** goes on to describe the furnishings. Then in **chapter 5** the ARC of the Covenant is brought into the temple – the ARC which represented the presence of God – let's look at **v 11-14**. The Lord's manifest presence descended upon the temple so that even the worship had to stop and the Levites had to stand – or fall on their faces in awe.

Then in **chapter 6** Solomon goes on to praise the Lord for His faithfulness to Him and David His father in allowing him to build the temple and then comes a prayer of dedication – if you like a statement about what the temple was for.

In verse **18-19** Solomon confesses that even this wonderful building could not contain the vastness of God. God can never be limited to one place, but Solomon does ask for a number of things:-

1. A place of God's presence (**v 2**)
2. A place of Worship **v2-11**
3. That this will be a place of prayer, mentioned 15 times in this prayer of dedication. Remember how Jesus became so angry when at the temple built by Herod He turned over the tables of the money changers and drove them out declaring as recorded on **Matthew 21:13 "My Temple will be called a place of prayer, but you have turned it into a den of thieves!"**
4. As **verse 21** says, that it will be a place of forgiveness – that those who have done wrong can humble themselves and seek God and receive His forgiveness.
5. **V22-23** describes the temple as a place of Justice where disputes can be resolved.
6. **v24-25** talks about it being a place of restoration – where those who have been exiled because of their sin can return and be restored.
7. **v26-31** A place of provision, where as people put things right with God He will release His abundant provision
8. **v32-34** A place for all peoples to connect with God.
9. **v34—39** A place of victory and again of restoration and prayer.
10. **v40-41** – again a place of prayer and a place of God's Presence – His resting place.

Then there is that verse, after the end of chapter 6 and before chapter 7 where Solomon says, 'And may this place become an idol, which diverts our time and resources away from you and your people to such a degree that you choose to destroy this fine temple.'

No – you don't have that verse, well of course nor do I, but actually that is what happened.

Judgement on the temple

Jer 7:1-15 – here we see God's judgement upon the Israel because of their deeds. Instead of the temple being what it was intended it had become an idol in itself. People neglected God and abused their neighbours but thought everything was OK because they still had the temple.

God is more concerned for people than for building; He is more concerned with the state of our hearts than with the state of decoration in a building.

The temple wasn't wrong, but what it had come to symbolise was, that bricks and mortar and religious observance could replace prayer, justice, righteousness, repentance, unity and humility.

Let's start as we mean to go on.

Those of you who have been engaging with the progress of Freshwaters 'Crossing Over' will know that we have begun to focus our prayers on the Netteswell ward and that we have identified a building within that ward which we are asking the Lord to give to us.

Now let me ask you a question that I have been asking myself, what are you more excited about, an opportunity to reach the people or an opportunity to have a building. What is more important, building a place of worship or building a people of worship?

We are not called to build a building, we are called to build God's Kingdom and to use building or finance or influence in order to enable that.

I don't think it is wrong for us to take over this building, I don't think it is wrong for us to refurbish it and to make it a friendly welcoming place, but we need to make sure that it serves the vision God has given us to reach the people, rather than becoming an end in itself.

So what do we believe this building is for? Well I think we could take Solomon's intentions for the temple as a check list for us.

Firstly it is **a place of God's presence** – Solomon starts his prayer in **v 2** with '**Now I have built a glorious Temple for you, a place where you can live forever, then near the end in the first part of v 41 he says 'And now arise, O Lord God, and enter your resting place, along with the ARC the symbol of your power.'**

We want Freshwaters Gathering Place to be a place of His presence, we don't just want a nice building for people to admire, we want people to encounter the wonderful, miracle working Holy God that we worship.

Then it's **a place of worship** – we want to have a place where we worship and exalt our wonderful God, not where we worship and admire a building. Our focus must be on the God of the temple and not the temple for God.

Then it must be a **place of prayer**. There are 15 references to prayer and two to petitions in Solomon's prayer. We need to ensure that we are a people of prayer, that our focus is upon God and that we recognise as I was talking about last week that there is an intimate relationship between what happens in the 'Presence Reality' that surrounds God and the 'Present Reality' of our day to day lives.

Now the people of Israel did not wait until the temple was built before they uttered their first prayer and nor did they stop praying when the temple was demolished. Whatever way you look at it, we will not achieve anything of significance in Harlow without God's help, and prayer connects us with that help and power. We need to be praying now, not just when we have a building, we need to pray

as individuals and in groups. We need to engage with what God is calling us to be and do and for that we need to be a people of prayer.

A place of forgiveness – we want Freshwaters Gathering Place to be a place where people can come and find forgiveness. This is the fundamental truth of the Gospel that though we have sinned and turned our back on God, we can find welcome and forgiveness as we turn to Him in repentance and faith.

A place of Justice – we want the Gathering Place to be a place where people can find justice, I don't mean a court of law, but I do mean a place where people can find help and support in dealing with real or perceived injustice, for example the injustice of separation between parents and children because of a falling out of the adults. The injustice of poverty which sometimes is less to do with your actions and choices and is more to do with where you are born, who are your parents and what are your opportunities.

Justice is also about people taking responsibility for our own actions, not just demanding rights but accepting responsibility. For those committing Anti Social Behaviour and other crime, justice says we will listen and help you with perceived and real injustice which you experience, but you must also take responsibility for your behaviour which perpetuates injustice for the innocent victims of your crime.

A place of restoration, where people can be reconciled to God but can also be reconciled to one another. It is called a 'gathering place', the intention is to establish and build relationships, between residents, between old and young, between families, and for some between them and God. It also for some will bring restoration between church and the community, rather than church appearing distant and disinterested in people's every-day life it provides an opportunity for us to show God's love through practical action.

We want it to become a **place of provision**, a place where people can connect with the abundant provision of a generous God, whether people recognise as such or not. A place where the lonely find friendship, where the hungry find food (could we link to Foodbank for this?), where the youth find purpose, where all can find love.

It must be a place of welcome for all people, whatever their faith, gender, age, or nationality. This is not just a church space it is also a community space, where church and community feel equally valued and welcomed.

Start right and finish right!

Solomon did well to start right, but 400 years later they didn't finish right – in fact it wouldn't have had to finish at all if the people had kept first things first.

We are here for God and for all the people he draws to us. We may have buildings and resources to help us, but they are tools for our primary task of building the kingdom of God, they must never become ends in themselves.

I am pleased that there will be some gap between being called to a community and being given a place of our own. I hope the one will follow the other quite quickly, but I am going to make sure that we don't wait for a building before engaging with the community.

We will be looking at what this could mean for us from January, but what we can all do now is to pray and to consider our personal engagement with the area.

As part of this I would like you to consider a few possibilities.

Your chance to engage

1. Adopt an Estate.

At the back of church there is a list of estates in the area. Why don't you adopt one or two, perhaps ones you have had connection with in the past, perhaps ones that have people you know living in them. Once 'adopted' then start praying for that estate as often as you can. Ask for and expect connections with people who live there. Consider attending community forum meetings. Prayer walk the area. I'm sure you can come up with your own ideas.

2. Adopt a facility

Would you be willing to adopt one of the public facilities in the area? There is St Albans, Broadfields and the Downs primary schools. There is Burnt Mill secondary school. There is the college/university complex. There is the Leisure Zone, the Train Station, the skateboard park, the Town Park. Do you have any connections to any of these, would you be willing to pray for them, would you keep an eye out for any events that you could attend to get to know people better? In the case of the schools and the college, would you consider becoming a governor?

Whether it is an area or a facility – or one of each, put your name on the list at the back so that we know it is covered. Now there are far more facilities and areas than members of Freshwaters – at the moment, but God knows that. He rewards our willingness to engage with the little we have; as we are faithful with that then he will give us more.

3. Adopt the 'Freshwaters Gathering Place'

Remembering all that I have said, I am asking people to adopt the whole vision of the Gathering Place – not just the building but the concept of a place 'where church and community meet'.

You can engage with this in a number of ways

1. In prayer, we will need prayer all the way through, from obtaining the building, to refurbishing it, to setting up and running the community services and to establishing it as a place of worship and prayer where those interested can meet with God.
2. In finances, some may want to contribute to the financial costs of the project. As well as contributing to any offerings we may hold as things move forward, you may want to consider making a small regular donation which will go towards the costs of running the building and/or the services delivered from it.
3. In practical help – at some stage then we will need practical help, there will be clearance, re-fitting, decoration, cleaning then when the services are up and running volunteers for the coffee shop and other services provided for the Gathering Place.

I am excited about what the Lord is speaking to us about and I hope you are. It is way beyond our experience and we will need to be dependant upon God at every stage. However, I believe that the Lord has prepared us for this. It is time to have faith, spelt R.I.S.K. and to invest our 'talents' in such a way that the master welcomes us with a 'well done, good and faithful servant.