

Photos of the Faith – Building Blocks

Ephesians 2:11-22

Introduction

One of my favorite children's books is Judith Viorst's classic "Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day." Sometimes kids – kids of all ages – even those NOT named Alexander – have bad days. It just happens.

- Maybe something happened at school.
- Maybe they don't see eye to eye with their parents.
- Maybe they have an irritating sibling.

When those sorts of things happen, kids will often retreat to their rooms, and as they do, they might slam a door in the process ... just to make sure that everyone in the house gets the message that today is a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

Sometimes just in case the door slam doesn't fully communicate the current reality, kids have also been known to post notes on their bedroom doors, lest anyone attempt to enter in. Notes like these:

- "I'm angry at you and I'm not talking to you today and tomorrow. P.S. all day. P.S.S. I still love you."
- Having the worst day of my life by far. Do not enter! From your hated son
- If you don't give me that lolepop we are going to fite to fite to death
- And my personal favorite: "Mom, Dad, I love you but you can't cut my hair. If you do I will never forgive you. I love my hair and guess you don't love me enough to do what I want for a change. My heart. My buckets of tears."

Notes on doors are nothing new. They have been around for as long as there have been doors and materials for making notes. In the Ephesians passage read earlier today, the writer makes reference to one of these doors and one of these notes. He calls it "a wall that divides."

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility ... (Ephesians 2:14)

The picture painted here is a scene found in the Jewish Temple. The Temple consisted of a series of courtyards, each of which allowed the worshipper greater access to the Jewish faith. A Gentile Christian could only enter the first of these. If a Gentile dared to proceed farther than the "dividing wall" permitted, the penalty was instant death.

In 1871 archeologists discovered one of the plaques that hung on this wall of hostility. The inscription on it reads:

Let no one of any other nation come with the fence and barrier around this holy place. Whoever will be taken doing so will himself be responsible for the fact that his death will ensue.

In other words ... KEEP OUT! Gentiles not welcome!

But Jesus changed all of that. It's a good thing too, or you and I couldn't be here today. Through His life, death and resurrection, Jesus broke down the barrier and made the good news of the gospel a reality for all who would put their trust in Him and live, as we mentioned last week, "to the praise of His glory."

The text says it like this:

He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.
(Ephesians 2:17-18)

This is week two of a seven week series titled "Photos of the Faith." Each week we are capturing a word picture – an image – that reveals the truth of the text with regard to our walk with Jesus.

- Last week, we looked at Ephesians 1:3-15. In it we used the image of a plumb line. That allowed us to be reminded that the standard God establishes for us is not found in laws and regulations, but in a life that is lived "to the praise of his glory," a phrase repeated three times in those verses.
- Today our image will be a brick.

Bricks are good images because you can use them in two ways.

#1: BUILD A WALL (v. 12)

Look at verse 12:

Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

Paul is writing to a church filled with Gentiles who knew that reality. It is the same reality facing every person today who tries to make it through life apart from a faith-focused relationship with Jesus Christ.

Separate from Christ
Excluded from citizenship
Foreigners to the covenants of promise
Without hope
Without God.

That's a pretty bleak situation.

ILL: In Kurt Vonnegut's novel, *Cat's Cradle*, an important book comes to light. It is titled, "What Can a Thoughtful Man Hope for Mankind on Earth, Given the Experience of the Past Million Years?" The chief character in Vonnegut's book is anxious to read this book..

But when he does, he finds that it doesn't take long. The whole book consists of one word: "Nothing."

Hope was not a characteristic of the secular world in the first century either. The word was seldom used. Only occasionally do you find it in writings of that time period. When it was employed, it was almost always used in a context that refers to something illusory or even wishful thinking. Secular burial inscriptions reveal no content suggesting hope of an afterlife. In fact, one secular burial epitaph from Paul's day says:

I was not
I became
I am not
I care not.

At one time this bleakness was the reality of a large segment of the world. God existed, but they didn't have access to Him. But that is not the case anymore. The walls that kept people out, have been broken down. The good news once reserved for the Jews is now available to the non-Jew as well.

Jesus said as much as He prepared to return to heaven:

Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. (John 14:23-24)

Now here's the problem. Jesus broke down the wall, but many people try to rebuild it. There are always bricks to be found.

ILL: Thirteen months ago, not far from where I live, S&D Pallet company around 1 a.m. on a Thursday morning. The building was totaled. Massive steel I-beams were melted in the heat of the flames. Even today if you were to drive by that building, you would find piles and piles of bricks.

In the midst of the destruction and chaos of their lives, many people will attempt to salvage a few bricks and build a wall that separates them from Christ and His Church.

- The sins of their past become bricks to build dividing walls of hostility. "God could never love a person like me," they might say.
- The disappointments of life do the same. "I don't earn enough, know enough, dress nice enough."

To those people, Jesus says "Put away the bricks. I tore that wall down. Don't build it again."

#2: BUILD A TEMPLE (v. 22)

Jesus has another purpose for that pile of bricks. Look at verses 21-22:

In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. (Ephesians 2:21-22)

With those bricks, Jesus builds His church. It is one of the most beautiful images of the Scriptures. Jesus tore down that brick dividing wall so He could build a Temple of praise.

Once our sins separated us:

But your iniquities have separated you from your God ... (Isaiah 59:2)

As a result we were:

Separate from Christ
Excluded from citizenship
Foreigners to the covenants of promise
Without hope
Without God.

But now:

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:19-20)

Those bricks of separation are now bricks of testimony.

APPLICATION

Bill and Gloria Gaither have ministered to millions of people over the years with their gospel music. One of their simplest and yet most endearing songs has a verse that goes like this:

If there ever were dreams
That were lofty and noble
They were my dreams at the start.
And hope for life's best were the hopes
That I harbor down deep in my heart.
But my dreams turned to ashes
And my castles all crumbled, my fortune turned to loss

I don't know who this song is written about. It might be the story of the Gaithers. It might have been inspired by someone they knew. These were the bricks of a broken life. Does that describe you? Has it described you? Does it describe someone you know?

This world is full of people whose lives have been shattered – some by their own doing, others because of circumstances beyond their control. They might describe themselves in terms like the pile of destruction left behind at that pallet company. Broken, without hope, separated from God.

If it weren't for the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, that would sadly be the end of the story. But Jesus came. He broke through the barriers that were keeping people away from a life-giving relationship with Jesus.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Ephesians 2:13)

The subject of the song knew that truth well.

So I wrapped it all in the rags of life
And laid it at the cross.

And then Jesus did what Jesus does:

Something beautiful, something good
All my confusion He understood
All I had to offer Him was brokenness and strife
But he made something beautiful of my life

A temple of testimony. A sanctuary of praise.

Take your bricks and lay them at the cross, and allow Jesus to build something beautiful in your life.

Amen.