

Dear Friend,

My dad fought in WWII. He was a sergeant and commanded a tank with its crew. He has described his time fighting in Patton's army as long days of utter boredom and apparent pointlessness interrupted by minutes of terror. While he knew that he was part of something very significant in being a part of the Allied forces' fight against Nazi Germany and sometimes it felt like he was doing something important, yet most of the time there was little evidence that he was involved in anything of great importance.

I think that is a good description of what it feels like to be part of a church. We know that we are part of something significant yet we don't often feel like it's very important. We need regular reminders of the value of belonging to the church, just like troops fighting a war need regular reminders that what they are doing matters. As I was studying for last week's sermon from 1 Peter 2:4-5, I came across something in the OT that reminded me of the significance of belonging to the church of Christ.

In 2 Samuel 7, King David tells Nathan the prophet that he wants to build a temple for the Lord in Jerusalem where the people can worship God as he commands. Nathan told David that sounded like a good idea. However, later on, God told Nathan to tell David that while it was a good idea to build a temple to worship him yet David was not going to be the one to build the temple. Rather than David building a house for the Lord, the Lord would establish a house for David. By that he meant that one of David's sons would rule over his people forever. He also said that one of David's sons would be the one to build his temple, not David.

In 1 Kings 8 (some 30-40 years after 2 Sam. 7), King Solomon, the son of David, completes the temple in Jerusalem and has a service of dedication for the entire nation. There are two statements he makes in his address to the people and in his prayer to God that helped me to feel the greatness of being a part of Christ's church. First, in vv. 19-20 Solomon recalls God's promise to David, "...you are not the one to build the temple, but your *son*... he is the one who will build the temple for my Name." Next he says, "The Lord has kept the promise he made: I have succeeded David my father and now I sit on the throne of Israel, just as the Lord promised and *I have built the temple* for the name of the Lord..."

Solomon's building of that physical temple is a foreshadowing of that greater Son of David who came into the world to build, by his life, death, resurrection and ascension that greater temple, the church. As Jesus himself said, "I will build my church..." We, and the hundreds of thousands of faithful Christian congregations in the world, exist because Jesus is doing spiritually, what Solomon did physically. He is building his eternal, universal church by building local churches. We exist because of the work of Christ. Our existence proves that God is being faithful to his promise to cause one of David's sons to build the temple of the Lord.

After Solomon recounts God's faithfulness to his promise to David, fulfilled in his (Solomon's) building of the temple he prays. In this intercession we see foreshadowed

the intercession of David's greater son. Jesus, right now, is interceding for us, his church (Romans 8:34). What he is praying in heaven is clearly stated by Solomon in his prayer in v. 29. "May your eyes be open towards this temple night and day, this place of which you said, 'My Name shall be there...'" All the power of the great Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is being exercised towards this "temple", the church on earth, because we bear his name. We are, as the saying goes, "the apple of his eye." The eyes of the Father are always upon us and God the Spirit always dwells with us because of the intercessory work of the Son.

If you belong to Christ's church through faith in Christ then you belong to the most significant group of human beings to ever live. That is an objective fact, which does not depend upon your subjective experience. To say it another way, we know this is true because God says it is true, not because we feel it is true. We, out of all the peoples on the face of the earth are the dwelling place of God. We are his temple, his house. Father, Son and Spirit are at work completing this temple so that it will be ready as his permanent dwelling place forever. There is no greater association you can have, than this one. We ought always to rejoice in and pray for God's work on us and in us, his church.

Rejoicing to be part of his temple,