

# God's House

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[ 0 : 00 ] It is wonderful to be with you this morning. It is such a privilege to be able to bring God's Word to us, and I'm excited to dive into the Scriptures with our family this morning.

So it really is wonderful to be here. We have been looking forward to this time and moving to Hong Kong and looking forward to this Sunday for so many weeks back in Cape Town.

For weeks I used to stay awake at night just thinking about joining this family, and so it really is wonderful to be with you. We've had a great week with the staff in the office. Well, I've had fun. I don't know if they have.

I hope they've enjoyed it as well. But it's been wonderful to dive into the Watermark family. Now, I just want to give us a brief introduction. This morning we are starting a four-part mini-series called The Church That Jesus Is Building.

And the things that we're going to be looking at over the next few weeks are probably not going to be new to most of us. They're probably things that many of us would have heard and would know.

[ 1 : 02 ] But the goal for the next few weeks is for God to remind us in His Word about the foundational truths upon which this church is built and every church should be built.

And to once again bring clarity and sharpness, when we think about Watermark Church and we think about the church, what is it that God is calling us to be? And what are the foundational truths upon which this church is built?

And so that's where we're going to go for the next four weeks. Now, one quick disclaimer or caveat is that when we preach, often the application or the implication of our preaching is very personal. It's how does this relate to you and your workplace tomorrow? How does this relate to you and your family or your home life? For the next couple of weeks, we're going to be talking to us as a family. How does God's Word speak to us as a family, as a gospel family called Watermark Church?

And so the implications are going to be far more communal than individualistic. And then we'll get to that a little later. So I want to ask you as we listen to God's Word over the next few weeks to think about it in light of, God, what are you saying to us as a gospel family called Watermark Community Church?

[ 2 : 16 ] Okay? Great. So I want to invite Cynthia and Venus to come and read God's Word to us. And so let's listen to God's Word this morning. You guys want to come on up? Today's reading comes from Psalm 127, 125.

Please follow along in your bulletin or screen. Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil, for he gives to his beloved sleep.

Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord. The fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth.

Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them. He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate. This is God's words.

[ 3 : 29 ] Let's pray together as we consider God's Word this morning. Heavenly Father, we come before you and we come before your Word because what we as a church and a family desperately need to hear is you.

God, I pray that you will speak to us from your Word this morning. We're not here to listen to the opinions of man. We're not here to find three quick ways to make our lives more comfortable and convenient.

We're here to meet with the living God. And so, Father, won't you speak to us? Holy Spirit, won't you take the words of these pages and apply them to our lives and our hearts?

Won't you soften our hearts to hear from you? And I pray that we will encounter you today. We invite you here. We need you. We're dependent upon you.

Come and have your way in our lives and in our church, we pray. Amen. Amen. Now, if you've got your Bible, or I think it's in the bulletin, two things I want to draw your attention to before we get to verse 1.

[ 4 : 39 ] Now, when you read the psalm, right in the beginning, you should notice two things. It says, A Song of Ascent. And then secondly, it says, Of Solomon. Do you see that in your Bible?

Is that in the bulletin? In the scripture? Two very important things to take note of when we understand Psalm 127. The first one is the Songs of Ascent. So, in the Old Testament, every year, the Jewish men and women would travel three times a year from wherever they found themselves in Israel towards Jerusalem for the festivals.

And they would go to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices and to worship to God. And as they went there, the families, the cousins, the extended family would come. They would journey together.

They would sing these Songs of Ascent. And the Songs of Ascent are 15 psalms from Psalm 120 to Psalm 134 that would make up this collection of songs that they would sing together.

And so these journeys were like Chinese New Year for us in Hong Kong, right? They were like Thanksgiving for Americans. All the family would come together. It would be a time of family reunion.

[ 5 : 48 ] They would sing together. They would journey together. They would go on these pilgrimages together. And as they got towards Jerusalem, as they started to ascend the hills, the mountains which Jerusalem was built upon, as they would ascend the hills, they would sing these psalms known as the Songs of Ascent.

These songs reminding them about the faithfulness of God, how God had led His people. And Jerusalem was built up on a hill and so they would ascend the hill towards Jerusalem. And as they saw the temple, the high point in Jerusalem where God's presence was said to dwell, they would be reminded and they would sing these songs known as the Songs of Ascent.

And Psalm 127 that was read to us this morning is one of these songs. Second thing to notice, this psalm is written by Solomon. Now, many of the psalms are written by King David, some of them by the sons of Korah, one or two of them by Moses, but only two psalms are written by King Solomon, David's son.

And this is significant because Solomon was the one king who oversaw the building project of God's house. Remember, David goes to God and says, I want to build you a magnificent house for your presence.

And God says, you can't do that. But your son, Solomon, who will be on the throne after you, he will build a house for me. And so Solomon did. He built the most magnificent temple, which became the pride of Israel.

[ 7 : 18 ] Now, look at what Solomon says. Solomon, the one who oversaw the building of God's house, this magnificent temple, writes, unless the Lord builds the house, those that build it labor in vain.

And Solomon writes, for those of you that are going to Jerusalem, Jerusalem is Jerusalem, the city of peace. For those that have been on the outlying areas of Israel, and they're coming to the city of peace where God's presence is, unless the Lord watches over the city, those that watch over it stay awake in vain.

Friends, if there was one king in the whole of Israel, you could say, I know what it takes to build a great house for the Lord. I know what it takes to build a temple, to build a church.

I've planned it. I've organized it. I've got the people in place. Look to me. I will build a great house for God. It is Solomon. And yet, what does Solomon say?

Unless the Lord builds the house, those that build it labor in vain. Now, of course, Solomon is not saying that you can't build a big house or a big church for God just based on human techniques or humanistic thinking or big branding or the right marketing.

[ 8 : 33 ] He says you can do that, but it's all going to be in vain. Friends, shaky houses built on shaky foundations, no matter how beautiful they look, no matter how expensive the finishes or how wonderful the interior is, shaky houses built on shaky foundations are a bad investment and are dangerous for those who live in them or find refuge in them.

And so Solomon reminds us there is one foundation upon which God builds His church. Unless I, the Lord, am building my church, your efforts are all in vain.

And for those who are on their way to Jerusalem, as we said, the city of peace, cities were very important places for business and entrepreneurs. There's connections, there's business opportunities, but cities were also very important for the marginalized and the vulnerable. There was safety in numbers. In the outlying areas, you were open prey. Anybody could attack you. But in cities, there was refuge, there was safety. And so as the people came to Jerusalem, there was safety and security there.

And Solomon says, you can do all you want to secure it. You can set up watchmen, you can employ the latest technological advances, but unless Yahweh, the one true God, is watching over His people, the house of God, you watch it in vain.

[ 9 : 52 ] And so notice what Solomon, what God is calling us to see. God is not just asking us to invite God into our plans. As we as a church family look to the future and look to where is God leading us in 2018, God is not just saying, remember to include me in your plans.

God is not asking us just to invite Him to bless our efforts. God is saying, unless I am the master builder, unless I am at the helm, and unless you give me the controls, all your efforts are in vain. God is reminding us of the binary nature of His leadership. Either Jesus is head of His church or He's not. Either Jesus is the one building His church or not.

John Piper said it like this, if we do not trust in God with all our heart, but instead rely on our own insight, we might, if God allows it, produce a great monument, but in the end, it will only be a monument to our own futility.

Now, look at what Solomon says and look at verse 2 with me. Solomon writes, unless the Lord builds the house, those that build it labor in vain. But look at verse 2. Solomon then extrapolates this and he gets a little bit more specific.

[ 11 : 03 ] And he gives us both a warning and an encouragement. First, he warns us what happens if we think that the success of God's church depends on human ability or human strength or human wisdom.

He says here, it is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil. And I think there's two warnings here for us and really they're two sides of the same coin.

The first warning, the first danger is we forget just who we are. We forget who we are and we overestimate our own strengths and our own abilities and our own self-importance.

We tend to think sometimes as church leaders tend to sometimes think we have the ability, we have the wisdom, we know what it takes to produce a great church. If you do this and you put that program in place and you get those leaders in place, then surely we can guarantee the results.

This will be a magnificent church. And God says, have you forgotten just who you are? That you're only human, you're jars of clay and I am the glory.

[ 12 : 13 ] I remember a story when I was about 18 or 19 years old, so many years ago, I was on a mission trip and we went to the border of Sudan and Kenya to a UN base called Locky Chogyo.

And I was young and naive. I was 19 and I was with a bunch of other men and the man leading the group was about 55 years old, a very experienced man, a wonderful man of God.

His name was Henny, an Afrikaans man. And the one night, we're sitting in this bush camp, we're talking, having dinner, and I've been talking a fair amount and at one point, Henny, this older man, says to me, Kevin, I pray that God will take the I out of you.

I wonder what he means. He says, when I hear you talk, it's just I this, I that. I'm going to do this for God, I'm going to do that. I want to do this and I'm going to do this.

He says, when you talk, you just talk about yourself. I this and I that. I pray that God will take the I out of you. And then he picked up his plate and he walked away. And it was very quiet around the dinner table.

[ 13 : 28 ] I remember that night, I went to my tent and I got on my knees and I said, oh God, please take the I out of me. And just recently, I was on the website of a man who was moving from one country to another country to go for ministry purposes, to go and start a ministry.

And on the website, he was saying, I am going to this country and I will bring the kingdom of God there and I will bring a new realm of God's glory and I'm going to bring the spirit of God to these people.

I'm very excited for what God is going to do to me. And I thought, you need a friend like I had a friend. You know, the Bible says, the wounds of a friend are better than the kisses. The wounds of a friend are better than kisses of an enemy.

I thought, you need a friend like I had a friend. And Watermark, I want to ask you, will you pray for us as elders? Will you pray for us as leaders and staff that God will continue to take the I out of us? Because the greatest danger, I think one of the greatest dangers that the church, the modern church has, is we've forgotten who we are. We've forgotten that the most significant and foundational truth of scripture is that the church belongs to Jesus.

[ 14 : 34 ] There is one leader of the church and his name is King Jesus. And as a church, we sometimes think that the church has a business model. And if we can just get the business model right, we get some wealthy business people and we make a board of elders like we have a board of directors and we get a very nice venue and we get some fancy lights and smoke machines and amazing musicians and we get a wonderful leader that can speak well, he's strong, but also sensitive, vulnerable, and also full of vision, then the church is going to be a success.

And yet Jesus says, unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it, labor in vain. And I think actually at the heart of this is a bigger problem and that's that we forget just who God is. We forget that there's one head of the church, his name is Jesus. We forget that God is God and we are not. And we forget that at its essence, the church is made up of simple men and women, sinners who have found grace, men and women whose lives have been turned around by the living God, men and women who have encountered the living God, men and women who were lost and were found by Jesus, that the church is not in its essence great music or great kids ministry or good leaders that care for us.

And this is so easy to do because Jesus, in his humility, he often shrouds his glory, he restrains his power. And sometimes like Job or Joseph, we say, God, where are you?

And we forget that behind the scenes, God is at work in his people. And sometimes we forget just who we are and we forget who God is. And the Apostle Paul remembered this. Remember the Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians and he remembers his ministry and there's a wonderful church in the city of Corinth and he says, don't you remember all I did was I sowed the seeds.

[ 16 : 21 ] Yes, Apollos watered, but God was the one who brought the increase. And he says, so neither the one who sows nor he who waters is anything, but God who gives the growth is everything.

See friends, when we forget that just who it is that stands at the helm of this spiritual family called Watermark Church, when we forget that Jesus establishes and builds churches on the rock of the gospel, that he breathes life into dead bones as we sang this morning, that he makes dead people in their sin alive again, that he takes sinners far from God and welcomes them into our family, when we forget this, what will happen is the leaders will overwork and overworry and overorganize and overstress thinking that the success of this church is dependent on our efforts.

And the cleverer we are and the more gifted our elders are and the more professional our marketing and the grander our branding, we'll think that we can guarantee a success. And God says, unless Christ is front and central, unless you give him the reins of the church, everything we do is in vain. And Jesus gave us the same warning, didn't he? Remember Jesus, the night before he's about to be crucified and he's having dinner with his disciples and he's told them, he's warned them, he says, in a few hours time they're going to crucify me.

They're going to hang me up, I'm going to die. And the disciples who have given everything to follow Jesus must be wondering, has it all been in vain? We've given up family, we've given up businesses, we've given up our careers to follow you and now you're going to die.

[ 17 : 55 ] Maybe this whole thing has been in vain. And Jesus says this to them, remember I am the true vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me, you will bear much fruit.

But apart from me, you can do nothing. And so what am I, this morning Christ calls us to heed this warning. Unless the Lord builds his church, unless Christ is front and central, those who build it, rise up early, going late to bed, eating the bread of anxious toil, will do everything in vain.

But then, look at the end of verse 2. There's a contrasting encouragement. Because Solomon says, it is in vain that you rise up early, go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil, but God gives his beloved sleep.

Now, why is it, in the midst of great transition, when there's so many changes in God's house, in God's family, that God says, you can rest? Why is it, when Israel, are on the way to Jerusalem, and

they're bandits, and there's armies, and there's enemies, that are maybe bigger than them, and there's enemies, that have got more military power than them, and there's other armies, that are more established than them, why is it that God says, I will give you rest? How could these people, be at rest, when there's so many difficulties, and challenges going around them? Well remember, they're walking to Jerusalem, they're singing the songs of assent, and before they get to Psalm 127, they read Psalm 121, which says this, I lift my eyes to the heels, from where does my help come?

[ 19 : 29 ] My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved, he who keeps you does not slumber, he who keeps Israel, he who keeps watermark church, neither slumbers nor sleeps.

Friends, the reason why we can be at rest, and the reason why we can put our head, on the pillow at night, and rest secure, is because the one, who's really in charge of watermark, and the one who's really, on the throne of the universe, and the one who holds this church, so deeply in his heart, never sleeps, and never slumbers.

I know many of us here, hold this church, so deeply in our hearts, some of us have invested, so much time, and relationship, and energy, and resources, into this church. Friends, there is one who cares, about this church, even more deeply than you, and he never rests, and he never sleeps, and he holds us, in the center of his hands.

Friends, this is what God is telling us, that he is the head of his church, he is in charge, and that those, unless the Lord builds his house, those who build it, labor in vain.

Now, look at verse three with me. The first two verses of the psalm, are quite straightforward, but then in verse three, there is a big shift, that takes place. In fact, it is such a big shift, that sometimes, some people think, maybe these are two different psalms.

[ 20 : 47 ] Because, think about it, in verse two, God is talking about, giving rest to his people, and then in verse three, he starts talking about, children, and babies, and how can you have rest, when there is new babies in the house?

Surely there is a mistake here, right? Somebody did not think about this, when they wrote the psalm. How can you talk about, getting sleep, and having new babies? But, in verse three, actually, God is giving us, a profound promise.

And it's a promise, it's another promise, to encourage us. Because we might ask the question, well if God is the one, who is in charge of his church, if God is sovereign, over his church, how do we know, that God is sovereignly choosing, not to bless us?

You know, if we are the ones, that can't produce the fruit, only God can, how do we know, that God is just going to choose, not to produce any fruits, in our church? Maybe God is just choosing, that we will just work, and work, and work, and there will be, no blessing, no fruit from all our efforts. How do we know, that God is going to, actually bless our efforts? But verse three, is a profound promise, that if we will trust him, our efforts won't be in vain. God promises, fruitfulness, to those who look to him, and trust him.

[ 21 : 55 ] Look at what it says. It says, behold, behold, children are a heritage, from the Lord, the fruit of the womb, a reward, like arrows in the hands, of a warrior, are children of one's youth.

Blessed is the man, who fills his quiver with them. He shall not be put to shame, when he speaks with his enemies, at the gate. What's going on here? Well, I think just as a side note, a caveat here, it's important to recognize, just how important children, and youth are, to Christ our King.

Jesus is not just interested, in the house, he's not just interested, in the city of Jerusalem, he's interested in families as well. It's almost as if, the Psalm is saying, unless the Lord builds the house, those that build it, labor in vain.

Unless the Lord, watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. Unless the Lord, watches over your children, and your family, all your efforts, are in vain. And so, as parents, I want to encourage us, we need to be praying, for our children, we need to be teaching, in the gospel. We can't just think, we bring them to kids ministry, for one hour a week, and they're going to be disciplined. As parents, we need to be, applying the gospel, to their hearts. But at the same time, I want to encourage us, we need to be praying, for our kids ministry leaders, and our youth leaders.

[ 23 : 09 ] We need to be praying, for the children in our church. Why? Because children and youth, are a vital makeup, of God's household. But notice, one of the things that, one of the things that I've noticed, in Hong Kong, is that, we like to work, our children hard.

Right? We send our, Pat, is that right? You agree? We send our children, to school, for many hours. We bring them home, from school, and we give them, extra tuition.

And then on Saturday, they go to extra, extra tuition, and they work hard, with homework. Is that right? Does that sound right? Friends, we need to know, that giving our children, a good education, is a good thing.

And giving them, the best opportunities, is a good thing. But that's not going to guarantee, that we will make them, wise, secure, mature adults. Ultimately, we need God, at work in their lives. And the Psalm, reminds us, that children, are important to God.

But note, what actually is God, what actually is going on here, is that God is giving us a promise. And it's a unique promise, which is counterintuitive, but it's a promise, that we find, throughout the Bible.

[ 24 : 15 ] God is guaranteeing, the fruitfulness of our church, but he'll do it, in his time, and in his way. Look at what he says here. He says, children, are a heritage from the Lord. The fruit of the womb, is a reward from God.

Now, obviously, in Hebrew culture, unlike our day, people didn't get to choose, how many children they had, and when they had their children. Right? Everybody knew, that children were, your children, were in God's hands.

God chose how many children you had, and when you had children. There wasn't, contraceptives in those days. Right? But additionally, in the biblical language, children are considered a blessing, when two people, it's the blessing of the fruit, that comes, when two people come together, and make a covenant, or a commitment, to permanently, publicly, and exclusively, love each other, for the rest of their days.

So when two people come together, and commit, or covenant to exclusively, just the two of them, permanently, forever and ever, love each other, for the rest of the days, the fruit of that covenant, the blessing, or the fruit of that commitment, is children.

And so in the Bible, children are a blessing, or a fruit of two people, giving themselves to each other, forever. Now these days, we tend to think that, having children, is a matter of biology.

[ 25 : 38 ] Right? It's human will. We get to choose, when we want children, how many children we want. But actually, the Bible says, that even today, every child given, is a miracle of God.

Every child is knit together, in their mother's womb. On the day of conception, every child is a miracle. New life is a miracle. If, sometimes we think, that we get to plan, when we have children, how many we're going to have, we think it's a matter of biology, and science, until you have your first child.

Right? When your first child, comes out of the womb, and you hold that baby, in your hands, tears streaming down your eyes, and what do you say? Jesus, thank you for this new life.

You realize, the miracle of new life. And friends, the church is exactly the same. Sometimes in the church, we tend to think, oh, it's a matter of science, it's a matter of leadership.

If we just employ this person, put that person in place, if we just get, a successful board together, we get a dynamic speakers, we get an amazing worship leader, like Jeremy, we just get some people together, we get some fancy lights, some smoke machines, and some really, some good lights, that we can produce the results.

[ 26 : 49 ] And it ultimately, it's not as simple as that. Friends, God is making us a promise here. He's saying, just as when two people come together, make a commitment to each other, there is fruit, there is a life.

I promise to bless that covenant. In the same way God says, when my people come to me, and they make a commitment, they make a covenant, they trust in me, they choose to give themselves to me, permanently, exclusively, not relying on their own self-wisdom, not relying on their own strengths, they come to me and say, Jesus, have your way in our life and our church.

I promise to bless them with the fruit of that covenant. I will bless them with the fruit. Friends, Watermark, God is making a promise that if we as a church will commit to come to Him, to give ourselves to Him, permanently and exclusively, if we will trust Him, Jesus, to lead us and to guide us, He will bless us, miraculously and supernaturally, with new life.

He will bless us with only, with that which only He can bless us. And Jesus makes this promise in Mark 4, doesn't He? Remember in Mark chapter 4, Jesus tells three parables. He says, the kingdom of God is as if a man was walking along, sowing some seed.

And sometimes the seed falls on hard ground and the devil comes and steals that seed up and it never produces any life. Sometimes the seed falls and it sprouts a little bit but there's no roots and so it fades away.

[ 28 : 09 ] Sometimes the seed, the kingdom, the word of God, falls and somebody's excited for a few minutes, a few months, but then actually other things take their fancy and they follow those other things and they stop trusting me.

And sometimes you think, God, is there ever going to be any fruit? We are sowing, we are sowing, we are sowing. Is there ever going to be any life? And God says, but don't worry. The kingdom of God, sometimes you sow and there is a harvest 30 fold, 60 fold, 100 fold.

And then Jesus says, don't you remember the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. It's small, it's insignificant, it looks not very fancy, it doesn't look like it's going to produce much. It's so small and insignificant it's lying around.

But you sow that seed and God will produce life. It will produce one of the biggest plants in the garden. And then Jesus says, don't you remember the kingdom of God is like a man that scatters seed on the ground though he sleeps and he rises.

Night and day the seed sprouts and it grows all by itself even though he knows not how. Friends, watermark, Psalm 127 contains a wonderful promise.

[ 29 : 17 ] If we will trust the Lord, if we will build this church on Him, if we will look to Him and lead us and guide us, if we will build upon His word, not with tricks and gimmicks and shortcuts, He will bless us abundantly because He is the Lord of His house and this church belongs to Him.

Now, last thing as we come to land. There's one surprising aspect to this promise. There's something unusual about it because God says, I will bless you.

Children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. God promises to bless our efforts and children have a unique ability to be both the source of your greatest joy but also your deepest heartache.

Right? Is that right? When we first had our Sierra, she was one years old, somebody came to us and said, little children, little problems. Big children, bigger problems.

Right? That when your children are young, the biggest problems are smelly nappies and waking up at night. But as they get old and they mature, it takes a different kind of parenting. And children are such a great joy but part of the blessing of children is that they shape us.

[ 30 : 34 ] They sharpen us. Hopefully, they make us a better person in the process. Right? Children have a way about teaching us about patience. Children have a way of exposing the sin in our own hearts.

Right? Children have a way of exposing our own idols. And if we're honest, sometimes children are a challenge before they are a blessing. Am I the only one that that applies to?

If your child is next to you, you can keep quiet. Okay? Derek Kidner said this, It is not untypical for God's gifts that first they are liabilities or at least responsibilities before they become obvious assets.

The greater the promise, the more likely that these sons will be a handful before they are a quiver full. But friends, that is just like God's gift of grace. God promises these gifts of grace, but often, they come wrapped up in smelly nappies.

They come and they scream and they cry and they keep you awake at night. And sometimes you think, what kind of blessing is this? Can't I just order in a 21-year-old, mature, secure, stable child?

[ 31 : 38 ] You know, Uber Eats or Akia, don't you sell 21-year-old children that just, everything is sorted. They know how to dress themselves. They know how to feed themselves. Sometimes you think, God, where is the blessing in this?

Friends, this is exactly what God's grace is like. God blesses, but sometimes His gift of grace, they shape us and they sharpen us and they bless us in ways that we don't expect.

And some people, they write off God's gift. They disregard God's blessing because at first they don't seem like a blessing or they don't think what they're blessing like we expect. Remember, Jesus tells the story.

He says, the kingdom of God is like a man that found a treasure buried in a field. He sold everything he had to buy that field. And sometimes the treasures of God are buried in a field of ordinariness. Sometimes they're wrapped up in nappies and they come and they keep you awake at night. But friends, so often God builds His church the way that families raise children. Many hours of

investment.

[ 32 : 37 ] You sow and you sow and you sow and sometimes you think, is there any fruit? Is there anything happening here? Sometimes you wonder whether you're doing it right. Sometimes you think you're destroying your children in the process.

Sometimes you think, God, what is going on here? And then all of a sudden, one day you wake up and your children are mature adults and they are strong and they are like arrows in the hand of a warrior, strong and secure, mature and resilient.

Children who make you proud when they stand at the city gates. Friends, this is the way Jesus always builds His church. He takes that which is insignificant and He makes something beautiful out of it.

He takes something unoppressive and He makes something significant out of it. He takes that which is written off by the elites and the powerful and the beautiful and He builds a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

And this is the way that Jesus always builds His church. Remember, Jesus takes 12 men, some of them fishermen, some of them tax collectors, some of them religious zealots, and He brings them together and through these 12 men He fills them with His Spirit and He turns the world upside down.

[ 33 : 41 ] This is the way Jesus builds His church. He says, unless the Lord builds the church, those who build it, build it in vain. But He builds His church not the way we expect you, not with lights and impressive leaders.

He builds it with ordinary men and women, sinners like you and sinners like me. And He says, if you'll trust Me, if you'll let Me lead you and guide you, I will do something miraculous and wonderful in your church.

And this shouldn't surprise us because this is the way of the gospel. This is the way God has always worked. It's the way of Jesus who though He was God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but He chose to be born to an unwed teenage mom in the backwaters of Palestine, born in an animal's stable, laid to rest in an animal's feeding trough.

Remember of Jesus, they said, can anything good come out of Nazareth? Nazareth? What good comes out of there? Bethlehem? Where's Bethlehem? What about the important cities?

And yet, the gospel tells us that that's exactly how Jesus came. It's the way of Jesus who said, I will build my church. And yet, He built it in the most unlikely of ways. He didn't do it with beautiful venues and impressive orators and wonderful speakers and good-looking men and women.

[ 34 : 54 ] He didn't do it with smoke machines and beautiful music. He did it by offering Himself as an atoning sacrifice on the cross. Jesus built His church by being flogged and mocked and beaten and scorned and ultimately killed.

Jesus built His church by going to Mount Calvary, allowing Himself to be nailed to the cross. Jesus built His church not just by telling His disciples to turn the other cheek or to bless those that curse you, He did it by actually doing those things.

Jesus built His church by accomplishing for us what we could not do for ourselves, taking our sin upon Himself and giving us a righteousness which is not our own and then welcoming us into His family.

Jesus did it by giving us for free what we could not buy with all the money and all the gold in the world, the unearned, unmerited favor of God. And friends, still today, Jesus is building His church. But He does it by taking simple men and women, men and women whose hearts have been melted by the gospel, men and women who once lived for themselves in their own glory and now live for Him. Men and women who were once so self-focused that they couldn't even see Him and He went and found them and He brought them back to Himself.

[ 36 : 04 ] Jesus did it by taking people who lived themselves and now live for His own glory. Men and women empowered with His Spirit and He sends them out to declare His wonder of His love and His holiness, His perfection and His grace.

Watermark, whatever the future holds for our church, there will be ups, there will be downs. Let us remember this warning unless the Lord builds the church, those who build it labor in vain.

But let us also remember this wonderful encouragement. Behold, children, our heritage from the Lord. God's fruitfulness is guaranteed. God promises to bless those of us who look to Him for His leadership and His guidance.

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain that we rise up early, going late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil.

But God gives to His beloved sleep. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, Heavenly Father, at the start of this new year, we come before you in humility.

[ 37 : 27 ] We come before you with open hands. We come before you as a family, a gospel family, a family made up of men and women that have been, that have encountered the living God.

And we come before you and we say, God, come and lead us. Jesus, this is your church. You are the head of your church. And God, we don't just invite you to bless our works or our efforts.

We don't just ask you to come and be here. We say, Jesus, take the reins. Jesus, come and be at the helm. God, we long to be a church that blesses each other and blesses our city.

We long for Hong Kong to be better off because our church is here. God, we long to see men and women come to know you and discover you and their lives turned around by the power of the gospel.

God, only you can do that. Father, this morning, we ask you, won't you take the I out of us? Won't you take the self-sufficiency and independence away from us?

[ 38 : 39 ] God, may we be deeply rooted and anchored in you. God, we confess we need you. We ask you, God, to come and lead and guide us for your glory, God.

Put your magnificent glory on display, we pray, in this church and in our lives. God, may we be