

EXCEPT THE LORD BUILD THE HOUSE

~Other Speakers A-F: Richard E. Bieber:

I had hardly crossed the border into this cloud-covered mountainous country when a messenger appeared in the path and welcomed me by name.

"Beyond this range of mountains is a plateau where you will work in construction on the house of God."

That sounded clear enough. So you can imagine my surprise when, after seven days of travel, I arrived at the plateau to discover feverish building activity going on ... not on one magnificent cathedral but on literally hundreds, perhaps thousands of construction sites. There were geodesic domes, A-frames, neo-gothic structures, buildings that looked like factories, high rise towers. And at each construction site was a sign, "The True House Of God."

As I passed each site an army of recruits would come out and try to twist my arm to work at their site.

"This is where the real work is going on!", each would say.

But how was I to know?

At the far end of this bustling construction city was a quaint looking tent village. No construction was taking place, that I could see. In front was a weather beaten sign, "Kingdom Construction Company." The old man who stood by the sign made absolutely no effort to recruit me. But I was curious.

"I suppose your company's just getting started, Sir?"

"Doesn't this old sign tell you we've been here for a long time?"

"But where's the building?"

"Oh, my friend, you won't see the building until after the earthquake."

"Earthquake?"

"Yes, one day soon there will be an earthquake. Then you'll see it. Meanwhile, we just keep building."

"But how are you building? I don't see anything."

"See that cart going out of the camp with food for the hungry? And here comes a cart for more clothes. There's the water cart. The workers on these carts go out with a message, and each person who responds becomes a living stone in the house which God is building."

"But what does the earthquake have to do with it?"

"When the earthquake comes this building of living stones will appear as it is. And everything built by human vanity will disappear. Now, would you like to get to work?"

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation; and another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it. For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any one builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw — each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. I Corinthians 3:10-15

In each of us, even the laziest of us, there is the urge to build something; ... even if we never get beyond thinking about it in our heads.

- We want to build something that will last.

- We want to be able to look back and say, "This is what I accomplished."

It may be a house that we're building, or a family,
or a business,
or a reputation,
or a bank account ,
or a career.

A mother looks at her children and knows that with her touch on their lives ... she's building something.

A man looks at what he's accomplishing in his daily work, or what he's done to his back yard, or his car. We want to see results. We want to see this thing we've built still standing when we leave this world behind us.

This desire to build something is not wrong. It's part of the image of God in us ... that's why God gave us minds and hands. But like every other good desire we were made with, once sin comes in, the good desire is twisted into idolatry of some kind.

So the human race had hardly got started again after the flood when it was building the Tower of Babel, a shrine to itself, an attempt once more to be as gods.

"The land of a rich man brought forth plentiÂ-fully and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; ...'" (Luke 12)

i.e. I will build my enterprise to the point where I will be my own god.

The drive within us to build leads again and again to the disease of the soul ... where we end up bowing down before the thing we're building, serving it,
enslaved to it. We're caught up in another Tower of Babel.

And the most tragic form of this idolatry of building occurs among believers who claim that they are building something for God.

- We're building a work,
a congregation,
a Christian community,
a missionary outreach.

The hitch in this that we don't seem to see is,

- that we're building it,
- it's got our marks all over it.

We say we're doing it for the Lord and we dedicate it to him a thousand times a day ... but it's not his, it's ours.

Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.

It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for he giveth his beloved sleep.
Psalm 127:1-2

The tendency in us, as long as we're in this realm of flesh and blood, even after we're born again, even after we're Spirit filled, is to Â-rise up early and sit up late and eat the bread of. sorrows ... to build something which is so full of us and so empty of God it will one day turn out to be a tumor on the Body of Christ which will have to be removed by his burning torch before that body can be without spot or wrinkle.

Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it....

.... and there is a radical difference between the house the Lord is building and the house we build. And there is a radical difference between labor which is performed in the Lord, under the Lord, the Spirit of the Lord in us, on his house, and labor which we spend on our own house.

Much of the time we're so busy building our own house we can't even see the house the Lord is building....

- building with laborers whose drive to build has been crucified and raised from the dead,
- building with a beauty and a strength which, if our eyes were only open to see, already reveals our house as a pitiful imitation of his righteous kingdom.

He said to him, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon BarJona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it."
Matthew 16:15-18

There is a house being built by his hands all over the earth today, and it includes the labors of people of every nation. And unless we're involved in this building we're wasting our time ... we're rising up early, sitting up late, and eating bread of sorrows in vain.

A call is coming from the Spirit of God for us to leave our religious towers of Babel stand unfinished, and enter into the work of building that the Lord is building.

Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.....

1. God is building his house with people who have made him their treasure.

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."
Luke 12:32-34

Much of the building that is going on in Christendom has as its driving force, not the love of God, but the love of mammon. A house is being built which has God's name engraved over the door, but if you go inside to its inner sanctuary you will see a golden calf standing on a pedestal.

There are also enterprises in Christendom where the driving force is the lust to expand our ministry. Our treasure, then, is not God but our ministry. And how we work on our ministry! How we rise up early and sit up late and eat the bread of sorrows for our "ministry!" We've made an idol out of our ministry,

its size,
its purity,
its rightness,
its power.

But God can only use, in the building of his house, men and women who are free of the idolatry of money, and who are free of the idolatry of their own ministries ... whose treasure, whose driving love is God.

God is their life,
God is their joy,
God is their every-thing.

These builders alone are safe to fit living stones into the house of God.

2. God is building his house with people who are consistent.

Anybody can lay a few stones in the wall on a sunny day. But the house of God is going up in a stormy place, there aren't many sunny days. So the only builders who survive are those who work when it's hot and when it's cold, when it rains and when it snows.

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching.
2 Timothy 4:1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us....

Hebrews.12:1

"Oh, but I don't have it in me to persevere. I've never been consistent. I rarely finish what I start."

If you have Jesus in you, you have the power to be consistent. You were consistent when it came to indulging yourself ... you knew how to persevere to satisfy your greed. And now you can be consistent out of pure and sheer love for God. You can run with perseverance the race that is set before you if you keep looking to Jesus the author and finisher of your faith.

3. God is building his house with people who dwell in mercy.

"Go learn what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'"

"Be merciful even as your Father in heaven is merciful."

The clearest way to distinguish the building of God from the building of religious flesh is the presence or absence of mercy.

- Where there is mercy ... there is God.
- Where there is no mercy, even when the doctrines are sound and even when the principles are correct ... God is not there.

"Are you the one who is to come or do we look for another?" asked John the Baptist from prison. As much as to say to Jesus, "When are you going to start building something?"

"Go tell John again the things which you hear and see. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them."

i.e. "I am building something. Blessed is he who takes no offense at me ... who sees with eyes of mercy."

Mercy will move you to do things which will not "pay off" in any visible way ... which won't build your reputation or enlarge your ministry. But these very deeds of mercy, done in the name of Jesus, which look so irrelevant are the substance of eternity out of which God's everlasting house is built.

4. God is building his house with people who are satisfied to walk by faith.

....because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:18

The thing God is building is unseen except to the eye of faith. And if we build with and under him the eternal results of what we do will remain unseen, until the Earthquake.

But what a relief to be freed from the compulsion to make our work visible! What liberty to be able to work in the Lord strictly by faith and happily let our work remain hidden in God until the day when the fire of God comes to try everyone's work.

Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it:
except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.

It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows:
for he giveth his beloved sleep.

The Lord is building a house which will stand forever.

May the Spirit help us all to leave our religious towers of Babel behind, unfinished, and start building with him.