

Built in Love - 31st Jan 2010

What do we value most in life?

Over the weekend, we have asked ourselves this question, and the answer has come back relationships. Relationships with God, our family and relationships with our brothers and sisters.

We've looked at the book of Ephesians:

With Rubik on Friday night we looked at Ephesians 1v4 where God called us

**"Before the creation of the World to be holy and blameless in his sight"**

And we looked at the example of Hezekiah, purifying the temple of sin and the eager hearts of the people to repent.

With Jon on Saturday morning looking in Ephesians 2 at building on the foundation of the apostles. And at having the kind of concrete relationships which change our lives.

We have looked with Adrian and Maureen at Ephesians 5 and building great marriages and with Ben and Titi at ...

And now we will finish this retreat, trying to pull together, looking at how we can build the Riverside to be the congregation that God wants it to be. To build it right, will take hard work, it'll take seeking the truth and above all it will take Love and that is what this message is called.

Built in Love.

Prayer - Thank you for the heroes in the Riverside, who have stood the course during the great conflagration, who have persevered, who have built a church known everywhere for its love. Pray that we will never stop seeking to do what is right. We will not stand back from doing whatever your will is for us, whatever is pleasing to you. Pray that the riverside will grow, grow closer to you Lord God in 2010. Ask that you speak through your word to each of us today.

Amen

#### 1) Building the Church

We looked yesterday at this passage during the great marriage class, but this scripture was written to be understood and to teach two things, first to understand how to have great godly marriages and second to understand the relationship between Christ and the church. Let's read it now looking at the relationship between Christ and the Church.

Ephesians 5v25 -

Husbands love your wives... **Just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless....**

In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies

....After all, people have never hated their own bodies, but they feed and care for them, just as Christ does the church. -- for we are members of his body.

Christ loved the church, giving his body up for her, by dying on the Cross, Cleansing the church, so that it should be perfect, holy and blameless, without stain or wrinkle.  
Christ loves the church and never hates it, and because of his love he feeds and cares for us.

There are many over passages talking about the church as Christ's bride, we looked yesterday at

Hosea 2v16

'In that day,' declares the LORD, 'you will call me "my husband", you will no longer call me "my master"'

The context of our relationships within the church are those of preparing one another, the church for a great wedding. Relationships in the church should not be earthly relationships for we are the bride of Christ

Weddings, lots of things go wrong; stories of things going wrong, I was a best man at a wedding and there was a lovely girl aged about 10 sitting on top table, looked perfect then a wasp sting bridesmaid,

Even at our own wedding, all the lights fused in the church so the entire church was lit by candlelight. Then for the exit someone pressed the wrong button walked out to talk that!

Another wedding I went to the wedding went great but then at the reception, there was some kind of disturbance, a few people from the top table went out and didn't come back, then the bride went out and she didn't come back, eventually the groom was left sitting on the long top table all on his own. I went up to him, asked what the problem was, suddenly his Aunt appeared at the door with an upended champagne bottle in her hand like a club, she strided across the room towards Top table and the hapless groom and was about to smash it over the grooms head when fortunately a group of relatives, flung themselves on her and dragged her off.

Let's look at God's plan for a wedding.

- Rev 19v6

Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peaks of thunder, shouting: Hallelujah!' For our Lord almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him the glory 'For the wedding of the lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready' Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.'

God has already planned our wedding in heaven.

But even with our earthly weddings there is always a point of perfection.

Whatever goes wrong at a wedding, there is an amazing point when everyone is ready, when the doors open and the groom sees the bride for the first time..

**(Photo of wedding)**

When Amanda walked down the aisle, everything wonderful, beautiful, Amanda looked stunning, I felt more happiness than I could imagine, that my soul mate, the love of my life was here and I knew that we would be together forever!

Whatever it takes to get a bride ready for the wedding, whatever it takes to get to that point is worth it, the months of planning, the careful design of every last thing, the handmade rings, the dress made by a friend, the design and printing of the invitation cards, finding the right church, the right reception, the menu, the wine all these preparations were worth it, but also forgotten in the perfection of that one moment.

One day we in the church will face an even greater moment of perfection:

Rev 21v1-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new

It will be a time of Joy beyond our hopes and dream, when forever we will dwell with God. Every tear every sorrow will be comforted by God and every pain and mourning will have passed away.

We the riverside are going to be that bride, and our purpose and role is to prepare ourselves, for that day?  
Are we ready now brothers and sisters?  
What do we need to be perfect to be dressed in white?  
What do we need to get to that point when we are ready to be the bride of Christ?  
Let nothing stand in our way, to make this congregation ready for that day.

2) Building others up - Ephesians 4

Throughout Ephesians 2,3 and 4 it tells us how we must prepare each other to be that bride.

Let us look at some verses in Ephesian 4:

25Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26"In your anger do not sin"[d]: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27and do not give the devil a foothold. 29Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

We are called to speak the truth to one another, to resist Satan's attempts to destroy us and the church. Resisting satan, when he tempts us to bring each other down, Jon talked yesterday about how he used to speak sarcastically to people until he was challenged and how glad we all are for the brother that challenged Jon and more for his repentance, for Jon now is a huge encouragement, is there anyone in the riverside who has not been touched by Jon's warmth, his patience and his love.  
And that is what Ephesians 4 calls us to do, to only say what is helpful for building others up!!

All of us need daily encouragement.

**Village of Roseto in the US (read extract of medical paper re: power of relationships)**

Doctors, sociologists see the importance of authentic real community relationships, where everyone feels that they are linked into a wider family. And yet the society described in Roseto, is just a pale imitation of the bible tells us in the church to live. A life where we speak the truth to our neighbour's, where we build each other up and where we are all members of one body.

Jesus describes the greatest commandment in Mark 12v29  
The most important one I, 'answered Jesus, 'is this: "Here, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one

Jesus calls us to Love our neighbours as ourselves, it is an extraordinary command and we know that but in just doing these two commands, all the law and the prophets are summed up.  
It seems so simple, but so hard, and what does it really mean anyway to love our neighbours as ourselves?  
Sometimes, it is good to look at the context of the verses.

The first commandment is from Deuteronomy, it comes just after the 10 commandments, but the second is not from Deuteronomy at all but from Leviticus 19v18.

In the context there it comes straight after Lev 19v17 which reads "Rebuke your neighbour frankly so you may not share in his guilt."

That seems incongruous, but is it really, if we really love someone and yet they are heading down a course of action which we are sure will lead to calamity, should we not get to the point where we rebuke them to help them to try and see sense?  
Yes, of course, that is the right way, but how about us?  
When was the last time you even corrected someone?

We all love and remember the love verse and that is right, but have we forgotten that it must come a healthy dose of the rebuke frankly verse!

Getting balance right between between Love and Rebuke, between Grace and truth is a hard task for us. Jon challenged us yesterday, asking if we had come to the point where we had come to gentlemen's agreement to not challenge, let alone rebuke.

A few months ago, Rubik was talking to me about the lost, Rubik has a passion for the lost, that we all know. He was talking about how wrong it was that there were people in the Riverside who hadn't been in a bible study all year? Inside I was thinking in desperation, "DON'T ASK ME WHEN I WAS LAST IN A STUDY" my heart burnt.

I knew it was wrong, I admired Rubik with his love for the lost and how that love resulted in action, I saw the fruit of his passion, Rubik's example with Luke here today, with god blessing Rubik's life with Rebekka becoming a Christian a year ago this week, but whilst I admired him, whilst I knew where I was, was wrong, I still needed Rubik to open his mouth.

The next Sunday in church I got speaking to a nice young man it turned out he lives just round the corner from me, and so the conviction ringing in my ears, I arranged for him to come round to family group. And then not quite believing what I was saying, I asked him if he'd like to come round and study the bible. David Davtian was really keen to come round so we set up a time and then quickly I grabbed Rubik, and said you've got to come too, I can't remember how to study, Rubik came round and we studied with David, and half way through it all came back and I realised I still knew. Since then I've studied with David many times, sometimes on my own, sometimes with Rubik, Ed Bailey, Ed Priestley, Toby and Adrian.

I've been reminded of the Joy of showing the word of God to someone, I spoke to David on Friday who is back from Armenia and his heart is burning to get Baptised. I've regained the confidence that with this book, we can change peoples lives for all eternity.

2 Samuel 12v1-13

David repents, but the child dies.

- v1 reads that the LORD sent Nathan to David. He was sent to say uncomfortable things. Are we willing to be sent? Are we being sent now, is God calling you right now to have a conversation with someone, which may save their eternal soul from Satan, but we are holding back, because it would be uncomfortable.

Everyone, everyone needs a Nathan in their life and that means that every one of us must be a Nathan to someone.

- I've know Toby Champeney for many years, he's a radical man and we have gone very close, I feel that sense of brotherhood very closely with Toby and it has been great to have grown closer over the last year as we have been fellow workers in building the Battersea/Fulham Family group. Over the months we have confessed our sin often to each other, and indeed I don't think there is anything that we have held back, we have confessed the darkest secrets, we have opened the deepest pits of our hearts and souls to each other and to the light and that has helped heal me. Toby, recommended a recording "ministering to sex addiction" by... he sent me the recording and I ignored it for months, but eventually I listened to it, and between that recording and having a brother like Toby it helped me to change to stop toying with Sin and to put in radical steps.

I don't watch TV on my own at all. I don't look at any images of women on the internet or on my phone. I have software on all the computers at home that keeps the internet safer. I don't mind that, that is a bit

weird. I don't mind that, that is a bit radical, I'd rather be weird than have Satan playing with me like a poodle.  
I recommend to anyone who has ever struggled with lust or any form of impurity both to listen to that recording and more importantly to find a friend like Toby.  
To help us in things like this, we need a friend.

Proverbs 18v24 says

A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.  
That's what I think of when I think of Toby, he is to me a friend who is closer than a brother, and I thank my God for him.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

Do you have a friend closer than a brother? Do you have someone, who knows the darkest secrets of your life? Do you have someone who challenges you, do you have someone who even knows what to challenge you on?

This time last year, we talked about Family groups, and with that we talked about as part of that about having smaller groups or individual relationships where we could build strong one another relationships. Some people started that straight away, Bee, Jacquie and Amanda started a small group last January, they have reached an extraordinary level of support and openness in that group and it has visibly strengthened them all.

I was not so responsive, it has taken me months and months, to build those close one another relationships, to get close to Toby, to open my heart to the living challenge that is Rubik's life.  
How about you, my brother and sister, how has the challenge of last year fared in your life?

If you do not have a friend closer than a brother, then do not delay, find someone today and say

**'can we meet up somewhere and talk deeply, soon in the next week?'**

Many of us have fears, I have many, I love this church, but I have been hurt in it at times, and there are practices in it that I do not want to come back. However, to become the bride of Christ we must not let fear paralyze us.

Perhaps you feel that what I, or the church is calling you to is just the same hierarchical system that we had before.

Whole bunch of reasons we went wrong before - examples of things it won't be: **(Slides text one by one)**

One another Relationships

- 1) Not one over another Relationships
- 2) Advice not commandments - free to take advice or not
- 3) Free to take advice from anyone
- 4) Individuals or groups
- 5) Name not important one another, discipling, faith partners...
- 6) Not forced on you, everyone has the choice

Dear Brothers and Sisters, no one of us is an island, we are called to build one another up, to have friends closer than brothers, let us not delay.

### 3) Built in Unity

John 17v20-23

Jesus prays for us in this passage, he prays for us who have come to believe through the message of the first Disciples.  
He prays that we are all one.  
That we are one as Jesus and God are one.  
That we will be brought to complete unity.  
Jesus prays that we will be brought to unity, because that amazing unity shows the whole World that God sent Jesus and that God loves us.  
That is why we need to be unified, as a witness to the whole World.

I do not think we can create the kind of close one another relationships that please God, or that Jesus calls us to have, without this kind of Unity and to have that kind of unity we need sometimes we need to talk frankly with each other.

I've known Adrian for 17 years, from when Adrian was part of the traditional church of Christ and the small group of disciples in Liverpool that I was part of were meeting together with the traditional church of Christ. Ben Hill was I think 12 years old, wow he has changed, we all have!!!  
Adrian, and I have been friends for a long time, and yet stuff happens the events of 2003 was tough, the reconciliation of 2007 was fantastic and resolved things. However, trust is a precious thing, the Unity Jesus calls us to, the unity of God and Jesus, is more precious still.

In my sin I allowed a distance to grow up between me and Adrian, I did not seek the Unity, which Jesus calls us too, and which you the Riverside needed from us the Servants group a unity which as the leadership group of this great congregation we need to have!!!

For me to repent I needed to go through all those fears, to talk them through with Adrian, to fight for that close one another relationship. And Adrian and I did fight for that level of Unity that Jesus calls us to. We fought through those things together, we fought together for Unity to build a one another relationship, to fight against Satan and his schemes, to fight for trust.  
We fought and we won.  
Building this unity took patience and love, and now we try to meet once a week and that is a joy.

### Conclusion

We have a noble task, my friends to present this congregation to God **as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless**

It is an incredible task and one that to succeed we must dedicate our hearts and souls, our very lives in the pursuit of.

If we are to present this congregation as that perfect bride we need amazing relationships, relationships where we are

**building others up according to their needs**

Where we love each other enough to challenge

Where we have friendships closer than a brother  
And where we work through our fears and our sin to build a Unity that  
will amaze and convict the World.  
May God Bless us all.