

59TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE GOSPEL STANDARD TRUST

HELD AT CLIFTON CHAPEL ON 17 MAY 2025

Address given by Peter Wilkins on

“Building the Church in Perilous Times”

You will recognise the phrase, “perilous times” from Paul’s second epistle to Timothy. In 2 Timothy 3:1, Paul warns Timothy that “perilous times shall come.” He’s talking about the last days.

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.” (2 Timothy 3:1)

That expression, “the last days”, is the period of time from Christ’s first coming, to his second coming. We are in the last days; and the last days now have been present on the earth for almost two thousand years; and we do not know how much longer these “last days” will go on for. The Lord has not given us that insight; and we are warned to be sceptical and wary of those who claim any special insight into the time of Christ’s second coming.

But you will be familiar with the passage, I’m sure, and it is not my intention this afternoon to go through the way in which Paul describes the perilous times. Just to mention one expression: he speaks, in the third verse of that chapter, of men being “without natural affection”. And whenever I read that phrase, or hear that phrase, I can’t help thinking of the widespread evil of abortion in our country. It seems to be really characterised by those three words: “without natural affection”; and now of course we see attempts to bring in so called ‘assisted dying’. We ought not to be surprised at these things; Paul has warned us about these times, and he’s warned us that they are going to be difficult times. That word ‘perilous’ really has the idea of ‘difficult’ or ‘dangerous’. And, of course, Paul also warns us that all of these things are going to be accompanied by “a form of godliness”. In other words, these things are going to come in under a veil of things which are good. And of course you are familiar with how so many of these wrong things have crept in, even to the church, under the veil of ‘kindness and tolerance’. We have already heard something about that, this afternoon, from Dr Hyde. That pressure that there is to conform to what is called ‘kindness and tolerance’; and to stand against these things, is to be called, ‘unkind, intolerant’. So, I say, we ought not to be surprised at these things.

It’s not my intention to talk about the ‘perilous times’ so much, this afternoon; but to focus on the other half of the subject that I have been given, which is the subject of the ‘building of the church’. And of course all that we have heard this afternoon, the work of the Gospel Standard Trust, all of those who are involved in it, I am sure that is their ultimate goal: to be instruments in the Lord’s hand, whether to be assisting chapels or publishing books. I am sure that is the motivation for all of those things – the building up of the church of Christ.

And Paul encourages Timothy, doesn’t he. In the context of speaking of perilous times, he encourages him to continue. In the 14th verse of that same chapter:

“continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them”.

And what does he encourage him to do? Well, at the beginning of chapter 4, he encourages him, and charges him, to “preach the word”; to “be instant in season, out of season” (2 Timothy 4:2). The

building of the church must go on, says Paul to Timothy, regardless of the characteristics of the times; regardless of the greatness or smallness of the apparent effects of that labour. Paul says to Timothy that the work must continue. And of course we were just singing in that second hymn, those words in the last verse: “Yet must this building rise” (H141). And you can be sure that the building *will* rise, that the building *is* rising, and that the church of Christ is still being built today.

And we see that in the account of Nehemiah. We read in that 4th chapter of Nehemiah of the work of Nehemiah in building the walls of Jerusalem. And really, in the work of Nehemiah there we have a picture of the building of the church; and, of course, that was a work which was much opposed. We read about Sanballat and Tobiah, who despised the work that Nehemiah and his companions were carrying out; and yet that work continued, and that work went on.

Building the church. Three things, really, this afternoon. What do you need, to build a building?

1. First of all, you need **a builder** – someone who is going to do the work;
2. Secondly, you need **materials** – the builder cannot work without materials;
3. And thirdly, you need **tools**.

And really those are the three things that I want to bring to you this afternoon, seeking the Lord’s help and your prayers.

Think first of all about the **builder of the church**. Who is the builder of the church?

Look again at the book of Nehemiah, and you will see that Nehemiah recognised that it was the Lord who was behind the building of the walls of Jerusalem. In chapter 1 of that book, it was through the providence of God that Nehemiah hears about the walls being broken down; it is by the influence of God that Nehemiah fasts and prays over the state of Jerusalem; it is the Lord that Nehemiah prays to in chapter 2 when the king asks him what it is that he is making requests for; and when the king gives him permission to go and repair the walls, Nehemiah recognises that the good hand of God had been upon him: “the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me” (Nehemiah 2:8).

And then later on – well, all through that fourth chapter (as you may have noticed when we read it) Nehemiah is constantly recording the work of God in the building of the walls. It’s the Lord God that he prays to in the face of the opposition of Sanballat and Tobiah; it is the Lord that he prays to, as they hear about that conspiracy to come and disrupt the work; and it’s the Lord that he encourages the people to remember – “remember the Lord, which is great and terrible” (Nehemiah 4:14). All through the work of Nehemiah, he recognises the hand of God in the building of that wall. And again, in that hymn that we sang, we have those words in the final verse:

*“’Tis thy own work almighty God,
And wondrous in our eyes.”*

The Lord is the builder of his church. Remember the description of the church that Paul gives to the Ephesians, in the fifth chapter of his epistle. He speaks of the church being “a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27). Well, who can build a church like that?! You can’t, and I can’t, and the Gospel Standard Trust can’t – but the Lord can! And only the Lord can build a church like that.

We sang in our first hymn (372), didn’t we, the words of John Newton:

*“He whose word cannot be broken,
Formed thee for his own abode;”*

It is the Lord who is the builder of his church. And it's there, in the words of the Lord Jesus, those well-known words in Matthew's Gospel, where he speaks of himself as the rock, as the sure foundation, and he says, "upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

Our encouragement, and our hope, and our confidence, this afternoon, is not in the fact that we are concerned about the building of the church (though we should be and will be). But our hope and our encouragement is in the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ *himself* is interested in this work; is carrying out this work; and will perfect this work of the building of his church. He is the builder.

And then secondly think about **the materials**. What's the church made of? You know that when I use the word church I don't mean a building of bricks and mortar. I don't mean a chapel. When we use the word church we mean *people*, don't we. The church is made of people; the church is built of people. People like you and me. Christ is the foundation, but as Peter writes in his first epistle, he says: "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5).

The church is built of people; and it's built of sinful people. Now, you might say that it doesn't seem very wise for the Lord to try and build a perfect and holy church out of materials like that. Why does not the Lord build the church out of angels? Why does he not build his church out of the chosen angels – those glorious beings who are without sin? And why does he choose such weak materials as he does choose?

Well, the answer is in Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians. And the answer to that question, as to why the Lord chooses the materials and the people that he does, is for his own glory; *for his own glory*. Remember what Paul writes to the Corinthians:

"But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence." (1 Corinthians 1:27–29)

The Lord is building his church out of materials which are so weak, in order to demonstrate his power, and his glory.

You can imagine two men, who each are given a plot of land, and each given the task of building a house. One man is given an unlimited budget, and he can buy the best materials; he can buy the best bricks, and the best tiles for the roof; he can spend money on the best windows and doors. And the other man is just given a heap of, what looks like, rubbish; a few broken bricks; a few twisted pieces of wood; what really looks like rubbish. And both men begin their work. If you were to go back in a few months and find both houses looking equally glorious, and both houses built equally well, which builder would you say has the most glory? Well, it's the second builder, isn't it? And the Lord is going to glorify himself by building his church out of such unpromising materials as we are; as unpromising sinners as we are – for his own glory.

Now that second man, with that heap of rubbish to begin with, he's going to have to work on those materials, isn't he! Those materials are not ready as they are; he's going to have to work on them. He's going to have to square off those stones, he's going to have to straighten those timbers. And, you think of the work of the Lord in building his church – how much work he has to do! What is that work? Well, three things, really.

He chooses his materials. You can think of the work of God in election; what is the Lord doing as he chooses his materials? He is selecting, here and there, from amongst mankind, those who are going to be fitted to this building.

Martin Luther, in one of his memorable expressions, said something like this: "If I were the Lord, and the world had treated me as it has treated him, I would kick the wretched thing to pieces". But the Lord doesn't do that. He takes a Noah here; an Abraham; he takes someone like Rahab the harlot; he takes someone like Ruth; he takes someone like David; he takes someone like Paul; and some of you here. And what's he doing? He's taking those materials, and he is going to use them to build his church. He chooses these materials - these materials are no better than the other materials. He doesn't choose a woman like Rahab because she is better than all the other women in the world; he doesn't choose a man like David because he is better than all the other men in the world. He chooses sinners, like all the other sinners. But he's going to use them to build this glorious church. The work of God in election.

Then those materials that he has chosen are going to have to be **prepared**. It's no use trying to use them as they are. They are out of shape, they're twisted, they've got these rough edges. They need to be prepared - not only chosen, but prepared.

And you can think of the work of the Lord Jesus. Think of all that he did in his life, in his death, in his resurrection, his on-going work of intercession. What is the purpose of all this work? What is the purpose of all that labour? What is the purpose of all that suffering? It was on behalf of his people. All that he did, he did for them.

And then you can think of the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is at work here in the building of the church. Those rough materials, they need to be shaped; they need to be straightened; they need to be fitted for that place that the Lord is preparing them for. And the work of the Spirit is here; the work of regeneration, the work of conversion, the work of the Holy Spirit - this is a Trinitarian work, the work of this building. The work of the Father in choosing; the work of the Son in redeeming; the work of the Spirit in applying that salvation to one here and another there.

And through these means, these materials are being formed, and equipped, and made willing to fit into that space which is being prepared for them in this building. They have to be chosen; they have to be prepared.

But then there's one other thing. It wouldn't be sufficient for that builder to pick out, from that heap, some materials that he was going to use, and repair those materials. There is a step that is required beyond that. That is the work of **assembling**. The church needs to be put together. To have a building, you need not only to have good materials, but you need to put it together. There is to be *one* church.

Those materials are not much use on their own. You take one brick - what is it good for? Perhaps you could use it to throw at something, to damage it. You could use it to weigh something down, to stop it moving. But that one brick on its own is no use as a shelter; it can't keep someone dry; it can't keep someone warm. These materials, they need to be put together; they need to be assembled.

Now I wonder if you are an individual Christian who feels that you can stand on your own. I wonder if you are one of those who feels that you don't really need to be gathered into the church; you think that perhaps the work of regeneration and conversion has happened, and that that's all that's needed. But the church is not meant to be a scattered collection of bricks; it's meant to be a building. And there needs to be this putting together. The Christian is not meant to stand alone; but there is this assembling together.

And of course, when you think of a natural building, there is variety in the materials. If you are building a house, you perhaps might build the walls out of bricks, and then, imagine you have finished the walls, and you phone up the builders' merchant, and you say, "Well, I've finished the walls now. Can you send the next materials. I need to build the roof now, so can you send me the materials for the roof." It wouldn't be much use for them to send you more bricks, would it? The bricks are no good for the roof, just as the roof tiles would be no good for the walls. There's variety here.

When we look out into the church, when we see the people of God, as they are being prepared for this building, and gathered together, we don't expect them all to be the same. We don't expect them all to have the same experience. Your experience, if you are a Christian this afternoon, was bespoke, to make you ready to fill the place in which you have been put. And it won't be the same as the person next to you. There is variety in these materials.

Remember Paul's teaching concerning the church. He said it's like a body. Well, you take a look at your body – it's not all feet, is it? A body that is just made of feet would be of little use. But the body has various members, these various parts. It has hands; it has eyes; it has ears; and all of these parts work together to make a complete body.

These are the materials that the Lord works with. These, naturally no better than others – sinners, who are gathered out of the heap of humanity, and they are redeemed by the work of the Lord Jesus. They are sanctified – set apart – by the work of the Holy Spirit. And they are gathered in to the one true church of the Lord Jesus, as he builds his church. These are the materials that he works on.

But then thirdly, I said something about **the tools that he uses**. What are the tools that the Lord uses to build his church? This is why it's so important for Christians to be gathered together into churches. We could think about the tools that the Lord Jesus uses; we could speak about his Word, which, of course, is at the centre of the work of the building of his church. We could think about his works in providence; he certainly works through those things. But, you know, there is something unique about the church. The church, in a sense, under the hand of God, builds itself. The instruments – the tools – that the Lord uses to build his church, really, they are the same people that the church is made of. The tools that the Lord uses to build his church, they are the same as the materials that he uses to build his church.

And many of you, I'm sure, can think about your own experience. How is it that you came to faith in the Lord Jesus? How was it that the Lord gathered you into his church? Well, perhaps it was through the reading of the Word of God. But these holy men who, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote the pages of this book - they were tools in the hand of God, weren't they? Perhaps you can think back to a sermon that you heard, and remember the benefit and the blessing that you received from it - well, the person who preached that sermon was a tool in the hand of God. They were not responsible for that blessing. The Lord was responsible for that blessing. Perhaps you were blessed through a book that you read, or a hymn that you sang. Well, the person who wrote that book, or wrote that hymn, was a tool in the hand of God. Perhaps you were blessed through a conversation with another Christian. Well, that Christian that you were talking to was a tool in the hand of God. You see how the Lord uses these materials, out of which he is building his church, to be the tools by which his church is built.

Ephesians 4 is a key chapter here, and we read about the gift of apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Now for what purpose are those gifts given, in Ephesians 4:11? Well, Paul tells us that these gifts are given for *this* purpose: "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12).

What is 'edifying'? What does the word 'edify' mean? The word 'edify' comes from two words in Latin: the word for 'make' and the word for 'house'. To 'edify' is to 'make a house'; it's to build a building. And Paul says that these gifts are given – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers – they are given for the edifying – or for the building – of the body of Christ.

But further than that, later on in that same chapter, in verse 16, Paul speaks there about the whole body being fitly joined together. And notice what he says here, at the end of that sixteenth verse: He talks about that body being "fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part" – and notice that it's *every* part. And then he says this; that this body "maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love". You see what Paul is saying. He talks about the body making increase of the body unto the edifying of itself. This church is self-building, in a sense. This church is a church of people who are tools in the hand of God, and who are used by the Lord for the further building of the church. If you have been gathered into the church of God, you are to be a tool in the hand of God. So that the church, the body, maketh increase of itself, unto the edifying of itself in love. You may say, "Well, I'm no preacher; I'm no pastor; I'm no teacher; I'm not an evangelist; I'm certainly not an apostle." But Paul is not just writing about those people, is he? It is not just preachers.

It is not just there in Ephesians that Paul makes this same point. If you turn to Romans 14 you'll find Paul there speaking about the work of edification. In Romans 14:19: "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another." So, he's talking to the whole church of Rome there. He is not just talking to the pastors of the church. He is not just talking to the deacons of the church. He is not even just talking to the *men* in the church; but he is talking to the whole church, and he says, "Let us therefore follow after the things...wherewith one may edify another" – wherewith one may build up another.

Again, in Romans 15:2: "Let every one of us please his neighbour for *his* good to edification" – to building – to instruction – to encouragement. Not just the pastors; not just the preachers. But *all* the members are called upon to this work.

1 Corinthians 14:12, Paul says: "Even so ye" - and remember, he's talking to a church which is full of problems, that Corinthian church, isn't he? A divided church, a distracted church, a church which had become overtaken with wrong views of the spiritual gifts that they had been given. And he says, "Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel" - what for? For "the edifying of the church." For the building up of the church; for the construction of the church. Again, later on in that same chapter, he says, "Let all things be done unto edifying" (1 Corinthians 14:26). *All things* be done unto edification.

And then, finally, as he writes to the Thessalonians; exactly the same language. In 1 Thessalonians 5:11, and he's speaking again to the whole church: "Wherefore", he says, "comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do." This work of edification is not the work for the preacher only; the preacher is not building the church single-handedly while everyone else watches.

We sometimes get that - and I'm sure it is an unfair stereotype sometimes - but you get that idea of people who are working on the road; and one man is digging, and everyone else is standing around watching. The church is not meant to be like that. It's not one man building, and everyone else watching. The role of the pastor – the role of the preacher – is, in a large extent, this: to teach the church to build itself; to so instruct the members of that church, that they become involved in this work of edification, in this work of building. It's not meant to be a one-man band

And again, there's a variety. You think of an army. There are those people in the army who are very prominent, who are there at the front line. There are those people who are behind; their work is equally important. And this work of edification – this work of building – is a work in which all Christians are called to be involved. They will not all have the same work. They're not all called to do the same thing.

It may be a digression, but even what we call our secular employment comes in here, doesn't it? We sometimes fall into the mistake of saying that the only people who are working for the Lord, are people who are working in a church, or perhaps working for a religious charity. But your secular employment, if you are a Christian, when you carry out your secular employment, you are working for the Lord, and that work is just as much working for the Lord as the work of the pastor, the work of the preacher. "Let all things be done unto edifying."

Those who are gathered into this church, they are to be tools in the hand of the Lord. And they are there for this work of edification. This is the usual tool, the usual method, by which the Lord works: it's through the local church; through the local gathering of Christians.

What are they gathered for? Why are they assembled together? Well, Paul writes to the Philippians, and he speaks of them in this way, he says: "Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation" (there are the 'perilous times') "among whom ye shine as lights in the world". How are we to do it, Paul? "Holding forth the word of life" (Philippians 2:14–16).

And again, he's not just writing to the pastors there. He's not just writing to the preachers there. But he's writing to the whole church, and this is his encouragement, this is his exhortation to them all: "Holding forth the word of life". Each member has a part to play here; each member is involved in this work. It may be a small role, it may be a hidden role. But they have a role. This is why church membership is so important.

Why is it that people are gathered into churches? It is not just for *their* benefit. It is not just so that they can *receive* something from their membership. But it's that same framework that they're set in in order that they might *receive* – is the framework in which they are set to *give*. This work of edification.

This is why it is a tragedy - what has been described as 'dry Baptists'. And it shouldn't be a controversial statement to say this: if you are a Christian, and you have not been baptised – that is a problem. If you are a baptised Christian, and you are not a member of your local church – that is a problem. Something has gone wrong. I know these things are sometimes complicated in practice, and it's not my intention to discourage anyone. You may be wrestling with these issues. But these two principles we ought to be able to rest upon them, to come back to them, to remind ourselves of them; these two great principles: **all Christians are called to be baptised**. Baptism is not for Christians of a special kind. It's not for Christians who have faith, plus something else. It's not for those who have believed, and also have x, y, or z. *All* Christians are called to be baptised; there's no such thing as a Christian who is not called to be baptised.

What is the qualification for baptism? Well, we have the guidance of the Word of God, don't we. Think of the words of Philip to the eunuch; they come to that water. Here is the question of the eunuch: "what doth hinder me to be baptized?" Here is Philip's answer: "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest" (Acts 8:36–37). Now I know that expression, 'with all thine heart' has been a stumbling block to many. People say, "Well, my faith is such a weak faith, it's such an imperfect faith. Can I say that I believe with all my heart?" Well, Philip is not talking about the *quality* of the eunuch's faith. He

is not saying the eunuch's needs to be a perfect faith. A whole-hearted faith is not always a very good faith.

You can have a child sometimes, a toddler, they sit down to draw a picture. And they pour out their heart into that picture; but when you look at that picture at the end of the process, it is objectively just not very good. Well, sometimes our faith is like that. A *wholehearted* faith is not a *perfect* faith. It is not a faith without *doubt*, not a faith without *difficulties*. It's a faith without *alternatives*. And that was the faith that the eunuch had. "And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37).

It is a tragedy, the lack of understanding that there is in some people. I heard of a lady – she was an old lady, who has died now – and she was asked, towards the end of her life, whether she had ever thought about being baptised; and she said, "Well, I have never felt good enough!" And this was a lady who had sat under the ministry of God's Word in Baptist chapels for her whole life, and yet she'd never understood baptism.

Baptism is not for those who are good enough. When a person is baptised, they are not making a profession about their faith. They're making a profession about the Lord Jesus Christ. They're making a profession about him. Well, beware what you are accidentally professing. If the person who is being baptised is making a profession concerning him – the person who is not being baptised is also making a profession (inadvertently perhaps) about him. That is the first principle. All Christians are called to be baptised.

Then the second is this: **all Christians are called to be members of a local church**. Again, I know this is not easy in practice sometimes; but as a principle, it's a very simple one. Paul writes to the Corinthians; four times in that first epistle to the Corinthians he uses that expression: "when ye come together". He takes it for granted – even *that* church – he takes for granted that they will be coming together, that they will be gathering, that there will be that physical coming together in that church.

And, of course, you know what we have in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*" – why not? – "but exhorting one another" (Hebrews 10:25). Exhorting one another – that means encouraging one another, that means calling one another along, that means bearing one another forward. Exhorting one another, "and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

The local church is the framework in which the Christian is called to this work of mutual edification. If you are a member of your local church, you have a job to do. You have been put there for something. Not so much only to receive – but to give. Now I know that we have been brought up (many of us) – and it is quite right – that religion is a personal thing. True religion, we say, is a personal thing; but a religion which is personal, can very easily cross the line into a religion which is selfish. And a religion which is personal – and churches which value personal religion – can very easily cross over into churches where people do not really seem to care about each other.

I think about this sometimes when I go to London. I stand on the platform, and here is the train coming. And I'm concerned to catch the train. I'm not so concerned about the other people who are on the platform with me. I have a relationship with the train – I want to be on it. They have a relationship with the train – they also want to be on it. But between us, there's not much interaction. Well, churches are not meant to be like that! Churches are not meant to be preaching stations, where a number of people just happen to be in the same place at the same time, all looking upwards for a blessing; but there is to be this horizontal element. Think of a family gathering around the meal table. Imagine how you would see it if the family said, "Well, I'm not concerned about that person; I'm here

for the food.” You would say, well, that is hardly worthy of the name of family! There is this horizontal element to the church.

And this is how the church is to be built. This is how the church is to be constructed. These are the tools that the Lord uses. If you are a member of the church – you are a tool that the Lord is using for the building of his Church.

You may say, “Well, I don’t want to put my hand to it. This is the Lord’s work, isn’t it!” There were those like that in the days of Nehemiah. In Nehemiah chapter 3, we read about the nobles of the Tekoites. Chapter 3 is really a long list of those who were involved in the building of the walls of Jerusalem. But in verse 5 of that chapter, we read this: “next unto them the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord” (Nehemiah 3:5). And we do not know why they didn’t. Perhaps they said that this is the Lord’s work; perhaps they said that the Lord can just as easily do this without me; perhaps they said that I don’t want to put my hand to it; perhaps they said that someone else can do it. They “... put not their necks to the work of their Lord”.

Do you say, “I don’t want to put my hand to it”? What is your hand doing then? Has it got something better to do? There is no work better than this work! This work of edification. It is the Lord’s work. He is the builder ultimately; he builds out of people. The church is made of sinners; those sinners are there for a purpose. You think of a building like this one. Each brick rests on other bricks, doesn’t it. But each brick in turn is supporting other bricks. You remove one brick, there is a weakness left. And how much weakness there is in some churches, because there are those outside the church who ought to be in it.

It’s the Lord’s work. And the outcome is certain. Don’t imagine I am saying the outcome of this work is uncertain. The work of Nehemiah, the outcome of that was certain, wasn’t it, and Nehemiah knew it. When he is opposed, at the end of chapter two, by Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem, he answers them by saying, “The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build” (Nehemiah 2:20). The God of heaven, he will prosper us; how did he know that? Where’s his confidence? Is his confidence in himself? Is his confidence in those he is working with? Of course not. His confidence is in the Lord. He has proved something of the Lord’s power, hasn’t he. He knows something of the Lord’s prayer-hearing work; and his desire is for the good of Jerusalem, isn’t it, for the good of God’s people. “Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people” (Nehemiah 5:19). That was his motive.

Well, the outcome of this building is certain. The Lord Jesus says, “I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). The perilous times- you may say, “Well, you haven’t said much about the perilous times. How is the church to be built in *these* times?” It is to be built in these times as it has been for the last two thousand years. I know we sometimes like to imagine that these days are more difficult than any other days, but if you look back to the days when this chapel was built, and if you think of the sacrifices that people made in order to put together these buildings, which we now so often take for granted, the labour that they committed, the work that they put into it!

These days are perilous times, certainly; but the church is to be built in the same way as it was in the first century; the same way as it was in the eighteenth century. There’s no new method required, no new Bible, no new Gospel, no new Christ, no new Holy Spirit. It’s the old paths, isn’t it: “ask for the old paths” (Jeremiah 6:16). What are the old paths? They are not the paths of human tradition! They’re the paths of God’s word; the paths of the Lord Jesus Christ; the paths of the preaching of the Word of God, the careful exposition of the Word of God; the path of love. Jesus said, didn’t he, “by this shall

all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). What is that work of love? Well, it's the work of edification, isn't it - the work of building up.

And this work is a certain work. You know we have those wonderful words in chapter 2 of Nehemiah; let me close with this. What a wonderful thing it would be if this was true of us! When Nehemiah came to Jerusalem, after he had seen the walls burnt with fire, lying waste, he goes to the rulers, and to the nobles, and to the priests; and he tells them of the good hand of his God upon him. And he tells them about the king's word that he had spoken to him. And what did they say? "Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work" (v18).

May God grant to each one of us that same determination, that same willingness. And I know that I condemn myself as much as any of you this afternoon; "they strengthened their hands for this good work". "And they said, Let us rise up and build."

Amen.