

# **IN THE MARGINS: The unseen foundation – hope in the midst of ruins**

*By Tony Martin*

*Editor*

In the heart of downtown Jackson, Mississippi, stands a grand old building that has seen better days. It was once First Christian Church.

Following votes by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History Board of Trustees, the historic building is scheduled to be torn down. A parking lot will most likely take its place.

This grieves me. I have a bent toward historic architectural preservation, and ever since I've been working at the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, I've watched this building deteriorate. I drive by it daily. There have been attempts to repurpose it. Nothing has taken hold.

The imposing Gothic Revival building was constructed in 1950 and designed by the prominent Jackson architectural firm of N.W. Overstreet & Associates. The Mississippi Heritage Trust placed the church on its 2003 10 Most Endangered Places list. It was the fourth location of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). It served that congregation for fifty-two years, from 1950 until 2002. In 2002 the building was abandoned by the congregation (who removed the stained-glass windows) when they relocated to Briarwood Drive.

It's a large, stately church that has been a landmark for generations. Its spire still points heavenward, drawing the eyes and spirits of passersby upwards. But now, it's scheduled for demolition, a shell of sanctity soon to be turned to dust.

Yet, in its looming destruction, I find a parable of hope, a vivid illustration of a profound truth: though buildings may crumble, the true Church of God remains unshaken.

It's easy to look at the ruins – whether they be the literal bricks and mortar of a once-beloved church or the metaphorical debris of our world today – and feel despair. Turn on the news, and the barrage of bad reports can make it feel like the world is indeed in flames. Morality seems to wane, violence appears on the rise, and fear often seems more common than faith. It's in these moments, watching what we thought permanent crumble, that our hearts sink. But here lies the crux of our hope: God's church isn't made of stone and stained glass, but of souls and spirits bound by His love.

Let's consider what a church really is. It isn't the wood beams that hold up the roof or the nails that bind the planks. A church is not the ornate doors or the echoing organ. These are but the husk, the temporary shell we see with human eyes. The true Church is the body of believers – people like you and me, made alive by the breath of God. This Church is not confined to a single location or limited by time. It's expansive, reaching across continents and centuries, held together not by cement, but by the Spirit of God.

In the Bible, we find this Church described as a body with many parts (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Each of us, if we follow Christ, are a part of this body, connected in purpose and spirit, even if not in location. So, as the physical structures may face destruction or decay, the spiritual structure – woven together by God's own hand – thrives and grows. It adapts and overcomes. It reaches out in love and pulls in those in need of grace.

Moreover, consider the resilience of this divine institution. Throughout history, the Church has survived not just neglect or decay but fierce persecution and attempts to extinguish its flame completely. Yet here we are, centuries later, still

gathering, still worshipping, still serving. Why? Because what God builds, no human can tear down. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion endures across all generations (Daniel 4:3).

To my fellow believers feeling disheartened by the decay of the tangible, let this be a reminder of the intangible, indestructible nature of God's Church. You are part of something eternal, something that cannot be demolished by bulldozers or wrecking balls. Yes, the old church downtown will fall. It will become but a memory, a photo in a history book. But let it fall knowing that its decline is not the end of the story. It's merely a signpost, pointing us to the enduring, ever-growing congregation of believers worldwide.

In this world of chaos and ruin, let's be the bearers of hope and the builders of the true Church. Let's focus not on preserving relics but on living as active, vibrant parts of Christ's body here on earth. Engage with your community, share the good news, and be the living stones (1 Peter 2:5) in a spiritual house that offers shelter not just from the storms of life but also from the despair of destruction.

As you pass by the old church, or any old church, remember this: our faith is not in the buildings, but in the Builder. Our hope is not in the temporal, but in the eternal. And our mission is not to restore old ruins but to build up new lives in Christ. So let the physical fall away if it must. We will keep building, keep believing, and keep beholding the beauty of what cannot be broken.