

BEING KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY PASTOR TUNDE BAKARE



Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, fellow travellers on this journey:

I welcome you all to this momentous occasion as we gather to make history with God. It always amazes me that God, in His majesty, in His unquantifiable riches, and in the exceeding greatness of His power, partners with human vessels to accomplish His epoch-making purposes. I am awed by the fact that, although He could do without us, He chooses to include us even in His most significant endeavours. I find this demonstration of love so amazing that I cannot but exclaim in the words of the Psalmist:

“What is man that You are mindful of Him?” (Psalm 8:4)

Indeed, like the psalmist, when I consider the faithfulness of God through the years, I am moved to ask, “What is man that You choose to dream Your dreams through him?” In 1972, at the age of 18, I tore a sheet of paper from a notebook and planned my life. What I did not plan was this moment or the moments that have preceded it: Founding The Latter Rain Assembly in 1989 did not feature on that sheet, nor did my mind's eye even anticipate the possibility of The Citadel. How I got here is a story only God can fully tell. But here I am, knowing that it is in these seeming detours that God forges a new path, and knowing that the people who lead the most colourful, compelling lives have simply learned to dream God's dreams.

God's dreams, my dreams, your dreams, our collective, shared dreams have led to a point of convergence here tonight around our hopes for this country of promise. In many ways, if

not in all, the story of The Citadel is Nigeria's story; it is not the story of a lone individual, lone building or a lone congregation it is the symbol of a new way, a new people, and a foretaste of The New Nigeria. The Citadel will point to what is possible on the African continent, what can happen when we remember that our humanity comes in different colours and creeds but is fundamentally the same, and what we can make of the raw material of setbacks to begin to build again.

In 2012, in a hotel in Dubai, the idea of The Citadel came to me almost fully formed the way outsized dreams often come. Once again, I wrote on a note pad: "...a new phenomenon in church architecture". Between then and now, in spite of obstacles, peaks and troughs, defying bleak forecasts and a fierce economic recession, The Citadel is slowly but surely rising to prove an important point no matter the weather, no matter the storm, Nigeria will not collapse beyond recovery. That we are gathered here today at all is a down payment of hope; hope in the incontrovertible fact that Nigeria will survive this sharp, painful bend. Call me an incurable optimist, if you wish.

Truth be told, we may not yet be in the positions that will allow us to fully re-think and rebuild this nation, but we can build businesses, churches, movements that will be microcosms of that future we desire. As a boy, I had a burning desire to rebuild my father's house but was limited by my material poverty. However, once again, my ability to dream was set in motion I took two stones from the front of my father's house and swore I would return, one day, to rebuild. I made that statement on the 13th of July 1973 in defiance of my obvious and staggering lack, and I returned to rebuild that house in 2008. I left Abeokuta for Lagos with a dream, a portmanteau and 1 shilling and 3 pence as my total net worth. I stand here today with bigger, richer dreams, because of God's help and because of human kindness. Those two stones were symbolic of what I would do, The Citadel is a symbol of what we can be. The idea for The Citadel may have been given to me, in the way ideas have been given to you, but it is for all of God's children.

Rendering service to God and to humanity twenty-four hours, seven days of the week, The Citadel will fulfil the desire of God that the gates of His house be not shut:

Therefore your gates shall be open continually;
They shall not be shut day or night, (Isaiah 60:11).

In this regard, the Citadel is a building that will redefine the church's responsibility to society, demonstrating the nexus between work and worship and shining forth as a beacon of hope, a burst of infectious light that will spread. As a new phenomenon in church architecture, it will pioneer state-of-the art infrastructure and an innovative approach to building and construction. As a service hub, it will provide social services ranging from education to healthcare and from child care to recreation. As a national capacity building centre, its leadership academy will supply the nation with the right human resource

needed to manage the path to the non-negotiable greatness of our nation. This is the dream in my heart and I have no doubt that it resonates with the dream in your heart.

Prior to this time, I have never raised money publicly. Those who are well-versed with my demeanour will bear witness to the fact that I am very restrained in matters that pertain to mobilizing funds for projects. I frown at any tendency that suggests the abuse of privilege or position for personal gain and gifts that lead the receiver into captivity. This has always and still remains my default setting. I am however confident in reaching out to you because this is no personal project.

In addition, tonight's banquet has both biblical and historical precedents. I am reminded of David who, dwelling in a house of cedar, desired to build God a house and who, having contributed significantly to the building project, reached out to his friends, the leaders of the nation, and charged them to do same knowing that "the temple is not for man but for the Lord God". I am reminded of Nehemiah, who returned from the Citadel at Susa to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and the gates of the Citadel which pertain to the temple, a project sponsored by King Artaxerxes.

Nehemiah 2: 4 - 8. (NKJV)

⁴Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it." ⁶Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), "How long will your journey be? And when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. ⁷Furthermore I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governors of the region beyond the River, that they must permit me to pass through till I come to Judah, ⁸and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which pertains to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy." And the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me.

I am reminded of the Roman Centurion - a gentile, whose generosity was referenced by the Jews as they pleaded with Christ to heed his request for the healing of his servant owing to the fact that he loved their nation and had built them a synagogue.

Luke 7: 1 - 5 (NKJV)

¹Now when He concluded all His sayings in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum. ²And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die. ³So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant. ⁴And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, ⁵"for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue."

Building upon this scriptural foundation, I am also reminded of Frank W. Gunsaulus, the educator and theologian who needed a million dollars to birth the dream in his heart to build a new institute of learning that would redefine the face of education a dream he shared in a sermon he titled “What I would do If I had a Million dollars”; a dream that was responded to by Philip D. Armour; a dream that gave rise to what today is known as the Illinois Institute of Technology.

Today, surrounded by friends and family, I share my God-given dream and I ask you to support me as God places in your heart so to do. One may ask, is this the time to embark on such a project against the backdrop of Nigeria's economic challenges, against the backdrop of a recession? While some may think otherwise, I am reminded of the words of William Bradford who, speaking at the opening of the Plymouth Bay Colony in 1630, said:

All great and honorable actions are accompanied with great difficulties, and both must be enterprised and overcome with answerable courage.

Referring to these words on marble two centuries later, John F Kennedy, charging his nation to take the audacious journey out of the planet declared:

We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win...

Therefore, inspired by love for God and by faith in His awesome sufficiency that transcends every economic reality; with hope in the future of our nation and the promise of greatness that the Citadel represents, we choose to build for God and with God. We choose to build for the future. We choose to show the next generation that no circumstance is powerful enough to limit our God-given dreams.

As we turn our hearts to the possibility of a New Nigeria, may I ask that we please turn our eyes to the screens to experience a foretaste of what is to come. Behold the future of The Latter Rain Assembly; behold the future of Nigeria..., the Nigeria of our dreams.

Thank you so very much. God bless you richly. And may God bless our country, Nigeria.



pastor tunde bakare

