

Wood, Hay, Stubble or Gold, Silver, Precious Stones

Reading: 1 Cor. 1:1-31; 1 Chron. 29:1-2; 1 Cor. 3:11-15.

"Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God the gold for the things of gold, and the silver for the things of silver ... onyx stones, and stones to be set, stones for inlaid work ... and all manner of precious stones."

In this passage which we have just read from the letter to the Corinthians there are two or three main things which arise. They are, firstly, the foundation of life; secondly, the superstructure; and thirdly, the fiery ordeal. Life's foundation, life's labour, life's revelation. And the apostle says in connection with the first: *"According to the grace of God which was given unto me, as a wise master-builder I laid a foundation ... other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ"*. Jesus Christ the foundation of life.

I would step back a moment to say to any who have not accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as the foundation of their lives, that if the Word of God is to be taken seriously at all, if it has proved and is proving its ground of being believed and trusted, if there is any reason at all to accept it as indeed the Word of God then in the final issue when all things are brought to judgment and God winds up this present world order and system, as His Word shows He is going to do, there will be a very great deal which will be passed out to everlasting death and judgment. There will be that which will be gleaned and gathered from the history of this world into an everlasting habitation of glory, and that which will divide between the two is just the question, what is of Christ and what is not of Christ. That which will be gathered into God's habitation of eternal glory will be, and will only be, that which is of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. All the rest will pass out under judgment for ever, and then the only ground of hope, confidence, standing and salvation will be that the Lord Jesus has been the foundation of our life, and *"other foundation can no man lay"*. And there is no other foundation, and it will be a terrible thing to discover when the winds of judgment are blowing, that we have no foundation. So that the matter of foundations is a very urgent one, to be quite sure that we shall be able to stand in the day of judgment; and that is the immediate issue for anyone who may as yet have failed to take their stand by faith, definitely and positively upon the Lord Jesus.

For all others, the ground of a testimony in confidence and assurance is:

*"On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand."*

There are so many of us here who say that out of hearts that are deeply stirred with praise and gratitude; we know our stand on and in the Lord Jesus. Do you? Well, our prayer is, that if you do not this very hour may see you coming on to that ground of eternal confidence and assurance, standing on the Rock of ages.

Having said that, and earnestly entreated that you will at least give it the thought, the consideration of which such a momentous matter is worthy, taking no risks for your eternal welfare, let us come to the position where the foundation is laid, for here to these Corinthians the foundation has been laid. The apostle is not saying that he is going to lay a foundation, nor is he urging them to accept the Lord Jesus. He writes to them as those who are of the Church at Corinth, sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints. But even to them there is a very solemn word addressed in connection with the foundation, the foundation which has been laid, and the foundation which they have accepted; for the foundation is not all. The foundation requires something, presupposes something, takes something more for granted, involves something more. The foundation looks on to the superstructure and the foundation is justified by its superstructure, and unless there is a

suitable superstructure the foundation is not justified. That is, to accept the Lord Jesus as the salvation basis of our lives will only be adequately justified if there is some result, some superstructure, something constructed upon Christ, a life that represents something suitable to Christ. The Lord Jesus has come into our lives to be the basis of some testimony which will be erected and stand for all eternity to His glory. That superstructure is the only adequate justification of our being saved. And so the apostle sends this solemn word, this searching word to saved ones, with regard to what they are doing upon the basis of their salvation. And he points out that there are two things which can be done, and which men do, and there is evident fear in his own heart that these Corinthians who were saved, who had accepted the foundation, were constructing upon Christ something that would not stand the test, and his letter was sent to warn them of that and to show them what alone is suitable to their foundation.

As you know, he divides these building materials into two departments, of two kinds. On the one hand, gold, silver, precious stones; on the other hand, wood, hay, stubble. And his emphasis is this, that what is built upon the foundation of the Lord Jesus, must be wholly in keeping with the Lord Jesus, and that the superstructure must take its character from the foundation. A flimsy building of wood, hay, stubble is not a sufficient honouring of such a foundation as the Lord Jesus is. It would not be fitting to go to all the trouble of digging down to the very depths, the deepest depth possible, as He the Lord Jesus went to in His cross, and lay the foundation of eternal redemption, deeper than the deepest rooted sin in the race, going deeper than our iniquity and the power of our sin, all the work of Satan, all the heaped up ages of unrighteousness and wickedness, going deeper than all the consequences of sin, in judgment and in death, not only to the depth of known and conscious sin, but deeper than our knowledge of sin, so as to provide a salvation for us which is not only from known sin but from unknown sin and then to build upon such a foundation the worthless structure of wood, hay and stubble. I say it is not worthy of the foundation, it is not worthy of Christ, it is not in keeping with Him. The only thing that is in keeping with the Lord Jesus is gold, silver and precious stones.

Now when you press the enquiry into this Corinthian letter to discover what it was that the apostle was seeking to have set aside in the matter of building material, you will discover quite a number of things. I mention it that you might go to the letter afresh with this thought of enquiry. What is it in 1 Corinthians that will not stand and that is unworthy of the Lord Jesus, which is nevertheless the thing with which even saved souls may be occupied, things which represent the activities, energies, interests of saved ones, and yet is not worthy of the Lord Jesus? You will find that the letter opens up to you a very great deal of meaning and valuable instruction, and will provide you with a good deal of illumination as to what must be set aside as unworthy of Christ, for the whole of the first letter to the Corinthians is dealing with things unworthy of Christ and a seeking to bring in the things which are worthy of Christ.

It is not my intention to pursue that very far. If I mention only one thing which arises early in this letter you will see what I mean. Right at the beginning, as we have read, the apostle speaks about certain dissensions or contentions which were among these believers at Corinth, and he said they were of this character: *"For when one says, I am of Paul; and another I am of Apollos ..."*, and another, with no better motive than the rest: *"... and I of Christ"* (although it sounds a good deal better). And then the apostle shot in a question, an almost startling interrogation: *"Was Paul crucified for you?"*. Follow that through to its sufficient answer and you have got the heart of the whole matter. *"For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified"* (1 Cor. 2:2). *"For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ"* (1 Cor. 3:11). *"Was Paul crucified for you?"* (1 Cor. 1:13). What is it that you are building upon this foundation? You are building upon this foundation the teaching of men. Yes, what these men were teaching was the truth of God, it was all true and right, but they were taking hold of it and making it man's teaching, and in effect they were saying:

"Paul's line of things is my line"; others, "Peter's line of things is my line"; others, "Apollos' line of things is mine", and so they were putting men even with divine teaching, in the place of the Lord Jesus in His basic work. And do you know that has always proved to be a disastrous thing, "O we received our teaching from so and so, a godly man, who knew the Word of God and taught us. We received our guidance, our instruction from him", and they have made that man's line of things the material with which they have built, and the winds have blown and the fire of trial has raged; sometimes the fire has come along the line of that man making a mistake and being proved to be fallible. We had put him in the place of the Lord Jesus and the Lord will not allow that. Some other thing has happened to test out whether it is Christ and Him crucified or whether it is something of Christ which has, nevertheless, become for us a man's thing.

Let me urge upon my brethren who minister, to watch for that peril. It is one of the great dangers of ministry that there should be for a moment the slightest occasion for those who we teach to put their faith in us and to construct their spiritual lives upon us because of what we give them. Sooner or later they will be tested. You and I may come to an awful depth where we can help no one; they will be tested as to us and then it will be found out as to whether they are not only having their salvation in Christ or whether they are having their whole life in Christ, whether having accepted the Lord Jesus as their Saviour, something or some one else has been their support in life. And then I urge upon you to make sure once and for all, that your faith is not going to stand in any man or in any woman. Oh, the devil loves that sort of thing because it is in a realm in which he makes so much capital. He brings about those alliances, friendships and associations where we draw from other people our spiritual help. They become our props and we come to a state where we could not go on without them, they are indispensable to us, and then the Lord cuts them off, breaks in upon that alliance. And down we go, the whole superstructure collapses and we find that we have been building upon someone else; it was someone else's material. Beware of trying to make yourself spiritually indispensable to someone else. If you do, you will come to disaster because it is a violation of the foundation principle that Christ alone is to be the life of His people. The Lord will let you come to shame. And beware, my dear friend, that you do not rest upon any other saint, however saintly, but that you build upon Christ, and that you build Christ.

We speak in the realm of very important matters because the fire does try, and Paul was seeking to throw off this unholy thing. He found that this company in Corinth had impinged itself upon him and if he said anything, that is the end of all argument. If Paul did a thing, there is nothing else to be said for it; they swallowed anything that Paul said — and that is enough to scare any man who gets into a position like that, and he would say: "I cannot take this, this is wrong in principle, the foundation is Christ, the superstructure is Christ, it is all Christ." Read that first chapter again and you will find in thirty-one verses, the Lord Jesus is mentioned seventeen times. As we pointed out, an average of once to every two verses the Lord Jesus is brought into view, and the apostle knows what he is doing. He is seeing the perils for these Corinthians in the day of the judgment seat of Christ, and he has been thinking it out and he has come to one definite determination: nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And he almost, if he did not quite, shocked them by putting in this question: "Was Paul crucified for you?" and what you need and what I cannot do without is the meaning of that cross, and that is not Paul's cross; it is the cross of the Lord Jesus. All that Paul can ever give you must fall far short of the meaning of Calvary, the meaning of Christ crucified. It is the Lord Jesus.

Now what I am seeking to do, in this way, and by this exhortation, is to attach you in a new way to the Lord Jesus, that every day you shall be making discoveries of the Lord Jesus and bringing those discoveries into the spiritual structure of your eternal testimony; that you shall be building yourself upon Christ and in Christ. David said: "*I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God the gold for the things of gold, and the silver for the things of silver ... all manner of precious stones.*" "I have

prepared with all my might." Speaking spiritually, interpreting that from the divine standpoint, it meant David had laboured to get the gold which was suitable for the House of God, to the Name of the Lord; he had laboured to get the silver suitable for the House of God; he had laboured to get the costly stones. In a word these are the excellencies and glories and virtues of the Lord Jesus. These things represent those spiritual and moral glories of our Christ, and these are the building materials for eternity. When you come to the heavenly city at the end of the Bible, you find that the foundations are these. The street is of gold, the foundations are of precious stones. It is what is of Christ in moral and spiritual glory, wrought into the saints to make them the habitation of God, the heavenly dwelling place of the Lord. And that means that we have to give ourselves as David gave himself, diligently, and with all our might, to discover the glories of Christ, and to appropriate them by faith, to build up by these things. To give ourselves by prayer. What is the burden of your prayer? I have no doubt that when you pray you have many things to pray for, many spheres, many interests, and perhaps for your own spiritual as well as temporal well-being, but let us beware of this, that our prayer life does not resolve itself entirely into a matter of praying for *things*, but that there is a central and supremely important place to seeking the Lord for ever fresh unveilings of His Son Jesus Christ in our hearts. That is the supreme thing, the most important thing. "Lord, today reveal some fresh virtue, glory in Christ, to my heart, some fresh precious stones, some fresh meaning of the gold and silver, and cause that that thing shall become a part of me." That is building the House of God by Christ.

Now Paul knew quite well that building the Christian life upon what he said as a man, that that was wood, hay and stubble. That would go up in smoke in the day of the judgment seat of Christ because it was not something which they had received into the very substance of their being as of Christ. It was something they had taken on because another good man had said it. You differentiate how much of what you have, is that which has come to you by exercise in relation to your Lord, on the other hand and how much of what you have, has come to you because someone has said it. You trust that one, you believe they are sincere and right, and they walk with God; but you have accepted it as from them and it has not been wrought into you by spiritual exercise. You have not taken what has been said into the secret place and had dealings with the Lord about it, and therefore it still remains what someone has said. But the day will come when that will be found altogether insufficient and you will find that you are living by someone else's faith and apprehension of Scripture; it is not yours. Oh this sifting thing, it had better be done now. The peril of believers is just that they might have a whole mass of stuff which they are using as the building material of their life and their service, but which is not theirs because it has not been inwrought into them. You cannot come and take notes of an address and go off and give that out as though it was yours, unless that thing has been revealed in you by the Holy Spirit, and you have had deep exercise about it; in the day of the test it will not stand. We have got to go into the meaning of Christ's death with every bit of truth so that it shall be for us in effect, in very value, Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Now are you building? Or have you just accepted the foundation and stopped there? I am saved, I have accepted Christ, I have had a transaction with Him, I am a believer now. You have accepted the foundation, but oh that commits you to something more. The Lord is never satisfied with that. You know what the apostle says by the Holy Spirit here, that in that day when the fire shall try every man's work, those who have built with wood, hay and stubble (and this applies also to those who have not built anything at all), on the foundation will be saved but so as through fire. Do you want to be standing without anything whatever throughout all eternity, but that you managed to get into heaven? You just managed, like a person escaping from a fire, to get in. The world went up in a blaze and you just managed to escape but that is all. Have you started building? Are you going on in the Lord? Since your decision, since your acceptance, since your transaction, have you been daily growing in grace? Have you been daily increasing in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus? Have you been daily discovering something of Him? The Lord would have it

so; He has provided that it should be so. The Holy Spirit is here for that, but mark you, it means exercise. "I have prepared with all my might." The apostle puts it in this way: "... *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure*". "Work out" — the Greek word means "work right on to completeness". Are you working to completeness your salvation? And what are you putting upon the foundation? The day shall declare it and life will be revealed as to its value.

Now with one word or two about the differences that are seen here, we may close. Clearly the apostle distinguishes and discriminates between certain things when he speaks of gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble. Firstly he distinguishes thereby between the imperishable and the perishable, the permanent and the transient; that which will abide for ever and that which will come to an end, cease to be, and he says quite clearly that the imperishable is Christ and what is of Christ. Then as coming out of that he discriminates between the divine and the human, the gold, silver, precious stones. These are *divine* things. The wood, hay, stubble, these are the things of man, merely human things. Are we building by divine resources, by divine energies, by divine realities, or are we building by our own effort, our own resources, our own thoughts and judgments? You see this discrimination is traced deeply and thoroughly by the apostle with these Corinthians. He speaks so much about the wisdom of this world, and he warns them of the emptiness, nay the folly of the wisdom of this world. He says that is not building material for eternity, building with your own natural wisdom, trying to live a Christian life according to your own natural thought, judgment, idea. Let us dismiss this thing by the grace of God. We have heard of many who have taken this attitude: 'Well yes, now I am saved, I believe in the Lord Jesus, but I am not going to do what a lot of Christian people do, I am going to be very balanced, I am going to use my own judgment, I shall go so far but no further.' It is imposing their own thought upon the foundation, and they are going to build up Christian life which is the expression of their own natural ideas as to what a Christian should be. In the end that will go up in smoke. We have got to live by the Holy Spirit's teaching and let our own natural thoughts, judgments and ideas go altogether. The Holy Spirit is to dictate the kind of life we are to live, and we are to have no pride or prejudice that will block the course of the Holy Spirit and shut the door to Him. If we are afraid of being extra fanatical our fear will block the door to the Holy Spirit. We must be with the apostle at least on this: "*We are fools for Christ's sake ...*", beside ourselves for the Lord Jesus. Are you willing to be a fool for Christ's sake?

What is true in the realm of reason must be true in the realm of heart; natural desires, likes, preferences of ours tying the hands of the Holy Spirit, but preparedness to accept what we do not like. The Lord wants us to have that, to do the distasteful thing if the Lord wants us to do it. Our hearts must be open to the Lord that He can cause us to love what He loves, desire what He desires, and set aside all those natural likes and dislikes of our own. The divine and the human is here divided.

And then the apostle clearly discriminates between the costly and the costless. Wood, hay, stubble, that does not represent much cost. Gold, silver, precious stones, that is costly. When David came to the threshing floor of Ornan which was to be the site of that great temple, that House of God upon which was to be constructed that which was not for man but for God, he wanted to possess that threshing floor and he offered Ornan the full price of it but Ornan said: "*No, I will give it to you freely, without price*", and sought to persuade David to accept it as a gift, but David said: "*Nay; but I will verily buy it of thee at a price; neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God which cost me nothing*" (1 Chron. 21:24). Remember that the gates of the city are of pearl, the street of the city is of pure transparent glass, the foundation of the city wall, costly stones; and all that speaks of suffering. The pearl speaks of suffering, the gold speaks of the fire, the costly stones speak of a good deal of shaping and forming, battering and hammering. Costly are these things. Are you paying the price? Are you willing, with the apostle, to

"fill up that which is behind (lacking) of the afflictions of Christ"? Are you building the eternal testimony to His grace by accepting a share in His suffering? Or are you building upon that very precious foundation of Christ crucified, something that is the line of least resistance, that which costs very little, an easier way? If two ways are open is the eye first to see the easier way? Oh the fellowship of His sufferings — the costly way. Well, what is cheap will go up in smoke. What is not worthy of Christ will pass for ever. But that which has been built in suffering, built in heartbreak, built in the fire, will abide for ever. The city is produced out of the sufferings of Christ wrought in His saints. The costly, or the costless?

And we have said that there is the discrimination here between that which is suitable to Christ and that which is unsuitable to Christ. Of what do you account Him worthy? What is He to you? That will determine what kind of life you live and service you give. That will determine whether you will go all the way with the Lord, and suffer for His sake. That will determine whether you are prepared to part with the world and all that it has, for Him. It is never a question of your being put under any legal obligation to the Lord Jesus, to refrain from doing certain things and going to certain places such as the cinema, theatres, or dances. God forbid that any of us should come to that legalistic realm. It is ever and always a question *"What think ye of Christ?"* Does He deserve something more than that? Does He deserve a fuller consecration than that represents. When the Word of the Lord tells us plainly: *"Whosoever therefore would be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God"*, can we accept being *"... an enemy of God"*. He is worthy of something more than that. Oh yes, our lives must be worthy of Christ. What a great thing that was the apostle said about some of his brethren: *"Whether any enquire about ... our brethren, they are the messengers of the churches, they are the glory of Christ"*. You can think of very little greater, grander than that you and I should be said to be the glory of Christ, that is, Christ's glory reflected in us. That is the eternal state of those who build with gold, silver, and precious stones. That can never be for those who build with wood, hay and stubble for theirs will be shame and not glory. They will be as naked in that day of Christ, and not clothed upon with His glory.

I dislike the harsh side and would make the beautiful side everything. I would seek to draw you out wholly to the Lord by sheer love and appreciation of Him, and remind you of the greatness of the thing that He has done for you, and so make you see that He is worthy of a life that is laid down for Him. He is worthy; worthy that we should labour with all our might to discover Him, to live by Him, to search Him out, to procure His excellencies for ourselves, to live by them unto His glory. Jesus Christ and Him crucified — nothing else. *"For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified"*. Is that your determination? *"That I may know Him ..."*. Well, that will stand for ever, all else must go. The Lord make us wholehearted believers for His Name's sake.