

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles tonight to second Corinthians, second Corinthians five 10. And I hope everybody has a Bible. I know our first graders have Bibles and so first graders, maybe your parents can help you, or you can help them by in second Corinthians five. And then we're going to go to first Corinthians three second Corinthians five, and first Corinthians three. Now, tonight, we're going to talk about how to build a fire-proof life. And I told you that we're going to be talking about judgment for Christians. Now, if you'll look in second Corinthians five, 10, we want to read that one verse and then move. We're going to go to our main text in first Corinthians three.

This message is about judgment for Christians. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:10ff, “We [that means all Christians] must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ...” The phrase “judgment seat” is the Greek word “bema.” It is a word that was used to describe a raised platform at an athletic Olympic event. Here the judges would sit, and the winners of the athletic competitions would walk onto the raised platform, this judgment platform, to receive garland crowns for their accomplishments. We're all going to appear before that kind of judgment. Paul continues, “...that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” Our main text for this message is in 1 Corinthians 3. Let's start with verse nine because the last words of verse nine lead into this passage—it says we are God's building. We're going to be talking about the temple of God. But if you think that the church building is the temple of God, you are mistaken. You and I are the temple of God. That's where the Spirit of God dwells. And that's why Paul says we are God's building.

First Corinthians 3:10-17 says:

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. ¹⁴ If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames. ¹⁶ Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.

Have you ever heard of Judgment House? It's a drama many youth groups put on about a person who has died and they're not Christian. They stand before God at the White Throne judgment where God is seated behind a white platform before a huge open book. Two angels stand on either side like bouncers, and the person's name is called out. He steps forward and God says, "Is his name written down in the Lamb's Book of Life? The angels look and do not find it. God looks at that person with compassion, but yet with sadness and says, "Depart from me. I never knew you." And in the drama, that person is dragged, kicking and screaming into hell.

The Bible does say in Revelation, chapter 20, there is going to be a Great White Throne judgment for everybody who's not a Christian. But as a Christian, you will never stand before the Great White Throne judgment of God. You don't have to sweat and wring your hands and worry if God is going to let you into heaven or not. If you have given your heart and life to Jesus Christ, you can have assurance there's no condemnation for you. If you're a Christian, you won't go to that judgment, but you will face another judgment, the judgment seat of Christ. And that's what we're talking about. It doesn't have anything to do with about determining whether you're lost or you're saved; everybody who stands at this judgment is a Christian. And if you are a believer, you'll be there. If you're not a Christian and you never give your life to Christ before you die, you will stand before the Great White Throne judgment in Revelation 20. Christians will experience another judgment to determine the reward that you'll receive for being a Christian.

Think of your Christian life as a foundation. Paul said he laid the foundation, and that foundation is Jesus Christ. No other foundation can any man lay for your life other than Jesus. That's how you become a Christian. But what if a builder only poured the foundation after you contracted with him to build you a house? You'd say thanks, but you didn't finish. The foundation of your life as a Christian is putting your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. But upon this foundation, you and I are building a superstructure of Christian service. That's what you and I are doing from the moment that we're saved until the moment that we die. We're building a structure, a building, that it's made up of our Christian service. I heard about one preacher who was preaching in Ireland. And he was talking about how Jesus Christ is the only rock upon which the church is built. And somebody said, "What about the shamrock?" He said, "On Christ, the solid rock I stand. Every other rock is a sham-rock." Christ is the only rock that really matters.

Paul says there are two different kinds of building materials you can use. You can use gold and silver and precious stone to build a beautiful building. Or you can just build a real shoddy building made out of wood and hay and stubble. The only problem is the Bible says that one day, when you stand before the judgment seat of

Christ, it's going to be subjected to a fire. And that fire is going to determine the quality of your Christian life.

Now, what is the context of this passage? Paul has been talking about carnal Christians versus Spirit-filled Christians. He's been talking about somebody who's really saved, but they're backslidden. They do everything in the flesh. The Bible says their works are like wood, hay, and stubble. But those things that you do in the power of the Holy Spirit are like gold and silver and precious stone.

Carnal Christians are people who are Christians. You just can't tell it. It's like the little boy who had a dog. Somebody said, "What kind of dog is that?" He said, "It's a police dog." And the guy replied, "Doesn't look like a police dog to me." So the boy said, "Well, he's an undercover agent." There are a lot of Christians who are trying to be undercover Christians. They're trying to hide it. But Paul is talking about the kind of Christian life that you ought to be living so when you stand before the judgment seat of Christ, you won't have regret and you won't be ashamed. Let's notice three things about this judgment day for every one of us.

I. IT WILL BE A DAY OF REVEALING

Everything that we've ever done is going to be revealed. Look again. Verse 13 says our work will be shown for what it is because the day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. The verse is talking about fire, but not hell fire, so don't worry. The picture we see of Jesus in Revelation 1 is a reminder that when we see Jesus, he won't be gentle Jesus, meek and mild, like you pictured him on earth. He will be the ascended glorified Jesus. And when John saw him, he said his face was shining brighter than any whiteness he'd ever seen. His eyes were like blazing fire.

On judgment day, Jesus is going to look at your superstructure of Christian service that you built on the foundation of faith, and his eyes of fire are going to try it. And he'll be able to determine whether it's wood, hay, and stubble or gold, silver, or costly stones. What are we going to be judged on?

1. Our attitudes, not our actions

We are going to be judged according to our attitudes, not our actions. Now that's very important because I want you to relax a little bit. When I look at you, and you look at me, we can only see the things that we do—our actions. But aren't you glad that God can see the attitudes of our hearts?

One of my favorite stories is in 1 Samuel chapter 16. Saul is king, but he has disobeyed God. And so God wakes up Samuel the prophet and says, "Sammy, we need a new king. This Saul guy is bad. So you go down there to Bethlehem and find this man by the name of Jesse with some really sharp sons. One of those sons is going to be the next king. So I want you to go down there and anoint him." So Samuel gets up, goes down there to Bethlehem, knocks on Jesse's door and says,

“Mr. Jesse, I'm here because God has told me one of your boys is going to be the next king. So would you bring your sons out and let me look at them?”

Jesse's happy—he's going to be the father of the next king, so he starts parading all of his sons in front of Samuel. The Bible says the eldest son was big, tall, strong, and handsome. Samuel looked at him and thought surely he was the one. But God said no, he's not the one. So he looks at son number two, and he's big and handsome too. But God said no, and this process repeated until it was clear none of those boys would be king. Samuel asked, “Mr. Jesse, do you have any other sons?” Jesse said, “Oh yeah, I have one little boy, the youngest one and runt of the litter. His name is David, and he's tending some sheep. You don't want him though.” Samuel says, “Go and get him. We're not going to sit down to eat until he gets here.” So can't you just see them all standing around there waiting, looking at their sundials? Finally, David arrives. He was a pre-teen with peach fuzz on his face. Compared to these other big, strapping brothers, you'd have thought he was a bad choice. But God said he was the one. And then God gave Samuel an amazing principle. First Samuel 16:7 says, “Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” You need to remember that. God can judge you according to your attitude, even more so than your actions.

What is your attitude about serving the Lord? Do you sing in the choir or teach a Sunday school class because you have to? Do you do it grudgingly? Or is it something that you do joyfully and gladly? The Bible says to serve the Lord with gladness. God is able to look at your heart and discern your attitude. That's why the Bible says God loves a cheerful giver. Now, we'll take grumpy ones too, okay? But God loves a cheerful giver. It's hard for me to determine whether you're cheerful about it or not. But when you tithe, do you do it with a great smile in your heart with a great sense of joy? Or do you think you could probably spend this money better somewhere else? You're going to be judged by your attitude.

2. Our availability, not our ability

Now that ought to be comforting to all of us, because Jesus said to him to whom much is given, much is required. God is going to judge people who have great abilities with a much stronger, more stringent judgment. He's going to judge Billy Graham different than he may judge you. He's going to judge Charles Stanley different than he's going to judge other Sunday school teachers because he gifted him more. But he's going to judge you according to your availability. Do you say, “Lord, I am available to you. Use me for whatever you desire”? It's not how you have; it is how much you give of what you have.

Do you remember when Jesus was standing at the temple watching people drop their money in the offering? All these Pharisees and big wigs were dropping in great amounts of money. And the disciples were just standing there, slack jawed. The Bible says that a widow came along, and she put in two mites...half a cent.

That act went over their heads, but Jesus said, “Wow! Did you see that? This woman has given more than anybody else.” I'm sure the disciples said, “Wait a minute, Lord. I just saw a guy put in \$10 million in gold. And you're saying a half a cent is worth more?” He said, that's right. Because all the rest of them had given out of their abundance. She had given all she had. Jesus judged that gift to be much more valuable.

3. Our aspirations, not just our accomplishments

“Aspirations” means what you really want to do in life. God has given some people abilities that you may not have. I heard about two guys that were talking. One was a big, strong guy. And the other was kind of a little small guy. And the little guy said to the big guy, “If I was as big and tough as you, I'd go out there in those woods and I'd kill me a big ol' bear.” The big man looked at the little man and said, “Little man. There are plenty of little bears out there in the woods. You go out and kill one of those.”

You may not think God has given you much, but he wants you to use all that he has given you. Another passage of scripture that's very encouraging to me is 1 Kings chapter eight about King David. David wanted to build a temple in Jerusalem, but God gave the opportunity to his son, Solomon instead. In verse 17, Solomon had built the temple and was dedicating it to God. He said, “My father, David, had it in his heart to build a temple for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. But the Lord said to my father, David, ‘You did well to have this in your heart. Nevertheless, you're not the one to build a temple, but your son, who's your own flesh and blood. He's the one who will build a temple for my name.’” David possessed a desire in his heart to do something for God, but he never had an opportunity to do it. God looked at him and said, “David, because you had that desire in your heart, it was good. And I recognize that desire.”

Solomon was judged by the temple that he built, but his father was judged by the desire in his heart to build it. And they were judged as being equal. What is the desire in your heart? Do you really have a deep desire to serve God? It is the responsibility and the privilege and the task and the call of every Christian to share our faith. Some of you really have a desire to do that. And God's going to judge you according to that desire. But others of you, if you were honest before God, you'd say you don't want to do that. You don't want to witness and you have no desire whatsoever to do that. God knows whether or not you have a desire to do that. And if you're a Christian, you're going to be judged according to your aspirations, even more so than your accomplishments.

II. A DAY OF REWARD

Why are you going to be judged? So you can receive a reward for what you did for the Lord. Some Christians say getting into heaven is enough reward. They just want a little mansion over in the corner of a field in heaven. That's enough reward.

But it is God's will for you to serve him faithfully. And it is God's desire to reward you.

And if it is God's desire to reward you, it ought to be your desire to receive all the rewards that God wants to give to you. So don't back off of it. It is God's will for you. He says everything that you do for him that is gold and silver and costly stone is the kind of stuff that will receive a reward. Now let's talk about those three building materials.

1. They are small but valuable

I believe that sometimes the works for which you will be rewarded are those seemingly insignificant deeds that you do for Jesus, especially if nobody ever sees them. Remember when David was camping out in the desert with his soldiers and Saul was chasing him and trying to kill him? One evening David said to some of his soldiers, "Oh, I'm so thirsty. If I could only have water from the well near Bethlehem, that would be so wonderful. I'm thirsty for that sweet water." And that's all he said. Some of his soldiers loved him so much that they risked their lives and snuck into the enemy camp to get that water. When they brought it back to him, David did an amazing thing.

He took that water and he poured it out. But he poured it out for a different reason than you may think; he didn't pour it out because he didn't want it. Or he didn't appreciate it. Just the opposite. He said, "This is so valuable and precious to me that you would risk your life to do this small thing for me. I cannot even de-value it by drinking it. I pour it out as an offering of thanksgiving to the Lord." His soldiers were listening to the desires and the heart of their king. And they did a seemingly insignificant thing, brought him water, but it was such a precious act. God wants us to be the same way. He wants us to listen to his heart. He wants us to be so close to his heart and so close to his mind that we do little things for him with no desire for reward. And those are the things that he treasures. Wood, hay, and stubble are not valuable. But gold, silver, and precious stones are small but valuable.

2. They are found underground

I don't believe I am going to get a great reward for preaching. You know why? Because it's part of my calling. It's part of my job. So I don't think there's going to be a tremendous reward for that. And you may wish you could preach or teach, but God has gifted me to do it. I'm just using the gifts he's given me. But I honestly believe that when he's talking about gold, silver, and precious stones, he's talking about those acts that we perform that are totally unseen by other people; they're underground. Nobody ever knows you do it. I've done some things like that through the years. But I'm not going to tell you about it! Anything that you do secretly, only for the glory of God, are gold and silver and costly stones.

3. They are made pure by fire

You put gold and silver and costly stones through a fire, and they don't burn up. You know what they do? They just get more pure. Any impurities in the gold are burned out. A fire only makes those things more valuable. So you don't have to worry. When you stand before the Lord Jesus Christ upon the foundation of faith in him, you have constructed a strong, sturdy dwelling made up of those small, but precious acts that you did...not for the glory of being seen by men. It will be made pure by the fire.

Revelation says this about our reward. "I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on...they will rest from their labor for their deeds will follow them.'" Let's get our theology straight. We are not saved by good works. We are saved unto good works. Good works will never get you into heaven, but good works will follow you into heaven. And the good works that you do for Jesus are part of a super structure that you're going to be judged on.

III. A DAY OF REGRET

Verse 14 in 1 Corinthians 3 says, "If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward." Now that's the good part. "If it is burned up, he will suffer loss. Now he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flame." I suspect that much of what I've done in my Christian life is wood, hay, and straw. I really am convinced to that. What can we learn about those materials?

1. They are bulky, but they burn up

It's big in quantity, but it's very flammable. When I was growing up, we had a lot of hardwood trees in our yard and it was my job to rake the leaves. I wanted to wait till the last leaf fell off, but my dad wouldn't let me do that. I had to rake several times during the season, but I came up with a method of doing it. I would rake all the leaves onto an old bedspread and then carry that big bundle on my back to the backyard. It looked like I was carrying a heavy load. People would even stop and blow the horn, roll down the window and say, "Man, you sure are strong. How can you carry a big load like that?" I felt tough, but I didn't ever say it was just leaves. Leaves are bulky, but there's not much substance to them. That's true of a lot of the things that we do for Jesus. We may do a lot for him, but wood, hay, and straw acts are just bulky and will burn up.

2. They represent our good works that we do to be seen

This is anything you do for Jesus that you hope somebody is watching and notices you doing it. That's exactly what Jesus said. He said, "If you give your alms before man, that you may be seen of men, that's all the reward you'll get." If you like to pray flowery prayers in front of people so they'll hear you pray and think you're a spiritual person, that's all the reward you'll get. If you fast and let other people know that you fast just so they'll think you're spiritual, that's all the reward you'll get.

Let's face it. If you've ever done something spiritual in hopes that somebody could see you doing it, that becomes wood, hay, and straw. Wood, hay, and straw represent a person who loses his reward, but not his salvation. Please understand this. There are going to be a lot of Christians who stand before the judgment seat of Christ and will lose their reward, but not their salvation. God's not going to say to you, "Your little building burned up there. So go to hell." No. What does it say? It says you're going to be saved yet just as by fire. The foundation is still there. That's Jesus. And you're not going to lose that.

CONCLUSION

Imagine me standing before the judgment seat of Christ with you. There's a long line and I say, "I can't wait to get up there. I've just been so faithful to serve the Lord all these years." I feel that I have a huge super structure of service that I've accumulated over the years. Then I look over at "Richard." I say, "Glad you made it! Where's your super structure of Christian living?" It's so small that I barely saw it! But the more I start looking at what mine is made of, the more I see there's an awful lot of wood, hay, and stubble in there.

When Richard is before Christ, the flaming eyes of Jesus look on his structure of gold and silver and precious stone, and it just gets better! Jesus says, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joys that I prepared for you. Here's your crown of righteousness. Don't get too satisfied with those crowns, because you're going to cast them at my feet in a while."

Then I step up there and the flaming eyes of Jesus look at my super structure of Christian service. It's big and bulky. Have you ever seen what happens when you put a spark to dry leaves, straw, and wood? Poof! Oh, I'm saved. I'm there in heaven. But I'm going to regret that there wasn't more gold, silver, and precious stone.

Some people are still only interested in how much they can get away with in this life and still barely make it into heaven. Some say, "I don't mind even if everything I ever do for Jesus burns up, as long as I'm in heaven. That's enough for me." Oh no, it's not. Paul says it's like a man who is saved, yet as by fire. That's a picture of you waking up in your home late at night, hearing the fire alarm and realizing your room is filled with smoke. Soon, the room is almost completely engulfed in flames. You don't have time to grab your spouse. You don't have time to go and grab your children. You don't have time to do anything except run out into the yard as fast as you can. Your family, your pets, your possessions, your mementos, everything burned, and the house has crumbled. Are you going to say, "Well, that doesn't matter...at least I made it"? No, you're going to be saved, but you're going to regret it. What does the Bible say? It says that if it is burned up, he shall suffer loss. I honestly think that we'll cry at that time. But doesn't the Bible say there will be no tears in heaven? No, it says later in the book of Revelation that

God will *wipe away* all the tears from our eyes. Where do you think those tears are going to come from? There will be tears of regret because of this judgment seat. Because of people we didn't tell about Jesus who are not there. I believe there will be some tears for a while, and he'll have to wipe those tears from our eyes.

If you're a Christian, the foundation has already been laid. No other man can lay it. And that's Jesus Christ. But what are you building with your life? One day it will be revealed by fire.

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