

THE RIGHT FOUNDATION

A SERMON

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“He shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shouting’s, crying, Grace, grace unto it.” Zechariah 4:7

THOUGH I have taken these words as a text, my intention is to notice, in the first place, in relation to the mystic building to which our text refers, First, *the foundation*; secondly, *the structure*; and, thirdly, *its eternal consecration*.

I notice first, then, *the foundation*. The word foundation has, in the word of God, a variety of meanings. There is, in the first place, the original, or causational foundation. God had been pleased to take notice of a people before the world began, and that people he has given to his dear Son in the counsels of eternity; and he was as well acquainted with them then, before any of them existed, as he is now, or as he will be at the end of time, when all shall appear at his right hand, in all the spotless beauty in which the Savior shall present them. And hence the apostle, when reminding us of the iniquitous conduct of some, who denied the future resurrection of the saints to eternal glory, and whose religion; the religion of these heretics, was itself iniquity; and so there are thousands now, I believe, whose very religion is nothing but iniquity; hence, in the 1st chapter of Isaiah, we find the Lord there declaring that even their solemn meeting, the best part of their religion, was nothing but iniquity, because, with it all, there was an hostility to the truth. Then the apostle takes his refuge in these matters in eternal election, and in the infinite and intimate acquaintance the blessed God has with his people, so that he always knows them; that he will take care of them, that they shall not be lost. Hence, that the apostle might not be understood to be lamenting that some are lost that God intended to be saved, he says, “Nevertheless, notwithstanding these heretics, notwithstanding these doctrines that abound, that pervert the gospel, “the foundation of God stands sure, having this seal, The Lord knows them that are his.” “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” Here, then, eternal election is the original or causational foundation of eternal salvation. No election, no spiritual blessedness; no election, no salvation; no election, no sanctification; no election, no obedience; no election, no sprinkling of blood; no election, no resurrection; no resurrection, no inheritance; no inheritance, then there must be everlasting privation. Now, says the apostle, “the foundation of God stands sure, having this seal, The Lord knows them that are his; and, let everyone that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity;” depart from the mystery of iniquity, “and hold the mystery of faith in a pure conscience.” Hold

fast, then, this as one of the foundations upon which we must rest, namely, electing grace. No election, as I have said, no salvation. Then there are, also, the testimonial foundations. Hence, the testimonies of the prophets and the apostles are foundations upon which the people of God rest; as witnessed the apostle, "You are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens of the saints. and of the household of God and are built upon the foundations of the prophets and apostles. And hence. the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem, having in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, evidently mean their testimonies. And their testimonies are immovable; election is an everlasting foundation; their testimonies are everlasting foundations, they never, no, never can be moved. And then, third, before I come to the subject in our text, or rather embodied, though not expressed in the text, there is, also, the evidential foundation. Hence, we are to charge them that are rich in this world to be rich in good works, laying up for themselves a good foundation against the time to come. Now, this cannot mean an original foundation, as though their salvation originated in what they do; it cannot mean the inspired foundations of truth upon which they rest; and it cannot mean the mediatorial foundation, of which I have to treat carefully presently. What, then, are we to understand by it, laying up a good foundation against the time to come? Why, the meaning is this; you conclude that you are a Christian. Very good. On what foundation, on what ground do you conclude that you are a Christian? Well, I know that I am a poor sinner, and I believe in Jesus Christ, and I love his blessed truth; and on these grounds I conclude that I am a Christian. So far, so good; but have you no love to the poor, no practical love to the cause of God? The Lord has been kind to you in his providence, and yet you keep it so to yourself, and so uninterested, so unmoved by any of the necessities of the people of God, or the cause of God, that Jesus Christ cannot say to you at the last, "I was hungry and you gave me meat; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was in prison, and you came in unto me; I was sick, and you visited me." So then, every Christian must have his internal and external reasons for concluding that he is a Christian; there must be faith, but faith without works is vain; thus, laying up for themselves an evidential foundation against the time to come. And you will look back at some of these acts of kindness and see that you did it out of love to the Lord; and that shall be set down in your favor, not as a reason why the Lord should bless you, but as a proof that you were a real Christian. Yes, if you can do no more, if that is all you can do, and the necessity exists, even a cup of cold water given to a disciple in the name of a disciple, and because he is a disciple, because he is a follower of Jesus, and because he is your brother, because he is flesh of your flesh and bone of your bone, and of the same spirit, and because he is a member of the same heavenly family, even that shall in no way lose its reward. Thus, you find, then, the same word, you see, the word *foundation* has not only all these meanings, but many more; but these may suffice. So that, wherever you meet with the word *foundation*, if you wish to understand it you must look at the subject of which it treats. Thus, then, there is the causational foundation, that of eternal election; there are the testimonial foundations of the New Jerusalem, the testimonies of the prophets and apostles; there is the evidential foundation, the personal character of the real Christian; so that his conclusion that he is a Christian shall be upon a firm foundation; and none of these foundations can ever be shaken, but they are all essential in their place.

Let us, then, go on to notice that which we have more particularly to look to this morning, namely, the legal foundation. Jesus Christ is a legal foundation; that is to say, that this mystic church is built upon righteous ground, upon the ground of righteousness; righteousness lies at the base of it. And before I enter into that, I will mention a few scriptures to show this, because it is so encouraging unto us. Take, for instance, the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ; he reigns by his own

righteousness. What hope can a poor sinner have of reigning with Christ but by the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and by the grace that is by that righteousness? And if grace reigns, it reigns by righteousness; grace shall reign through righteousness unto eternal life. And if the Lord Jesus Christ be exalted, and he take the Old Testament, and loose the seals thereof, and accomplish all those wonders described in the Book of the Revelation, he does it on the ground of righteousness. "You are worthy to take the book, and to lose the seals, for you were slain, and have redeemed us unto God by your blood out of all kindreds, and nations, and peoples, and tongues." While in the first Adam we are unrighteous, there our foundation has given way; and while by the works of the law we cannot be justified, there our foundation gives way; and while the old covenant was a foundation that gave way; there remains, therefore, but one foundation now, one legal, firm, immoveable foundation, upon which we can build for eternity, and that is Christ Jesus the Lord. So that the church is built upon righteousness. And I will take, to give some degree of explanation of this, the words of Solomon in one of his proverbs, "The righteous is an everlasting foundation."

Now, if the church as a building spiritually is to be built up for ever, it needed an everlasting foundation; and Jesus Christ is that everlasting foundation; and if it be, as our text shows, a free-grace building, for "he shall bring forth the head-stone thereof with shouting's, crying, Grace, grace unto it," then it needed righteousness as the ground of the ministration of that grace; for God never did, and never will, lay aside the majesty of his law; he will never lay aside the rights of holiness or the claims of justice; all must be maintained; and, infinite and eternal honor to his dear name, all has been done, Christ has done it all; and therefore he is an everlasting foundation; a sinner may build there with eternal safety. Dig deep down, and examine the matter, and throw away all human rubbish, it is all debris and rubbish together, not worth having; and let our hope be founded upon Him who is an everlasting foundation, and then the rains may descend where they may, and as much as they may, and how they may; and the floods may rise, and the winds may blow; the building shall not be moved, for it is founded upon a rock. But the superstructure presently. I wish to show that Jesus Christ is a legal foundation; that salvation is founded in law as well as in mercy, in justice as well as in grace, in holiness as well as in compassion and lovingkindness; in a word, that all here is sweetly harmonious. And hence you will recollect that scripture, which will bear reading in the same way, in the 28th of Isaiah, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone", that, of course, is to denote its stability, strength, as the explanation goes on to show, "a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation; he that believes shall not make haste", shall not be confounded. Now substitute, in all those clauses I have named, the word *righteousness* for the word stone, and it throws a light upon it. "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, righteousness", that is, the righteousness of his dear Son, the whole mediatorial work of his dear Son; "a tried stone," a tried righteousness; and if ever a man's life was tried, Christ's life was tried; and if ever a man's holiness, and stability, and integrity were tried, I am sure Christ was when he died: it was a tried righteousness; it stood the test of sin, and came off spotless and perfect at the last; it stood the test of the curse of the law; it stood the test of all the rage of hell; it stood the test of all the ecclesiastical, military, and political powers that the world could muster up; and yet, at the end, after all the trials, he looked around and saw that all was well, said, "It is finished," bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation righteousness, tried righteousness; a stone, a tried stone." Moses has the same idea thus: "He is a rock", explanation, "his work is perfect", so it is. Any imperfection in Christ, he would cease to be the rock, give way; any deficiency, any superfluity, any deviation, he would cease to be the rock. "He is a rock." How is he a rock? "His work is perfect." It is a tried righteousness, a precious

cornerstone, a precious corner righteousness. So that all the building must be at right angles with this cornerstone; all the building must be at right angles with Christ's righteousness. Christian, if you can see what I mean, it will do your heart good. In order for you to be a living stone in Salem's streets above, in order for you to be a part of this building, you must be at right angles with Christ's righteousness. Oh, I hear the man who is established in the truth say, At right angles with it? why, his finished work is my only hope, his righteousness is dear to my heart, his death is dear to my heart. His perfection! why, it is to me the perfection of beauty; God shines out of Zion. My heart is at right angles, entirely square with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Precious! I do not wonder at the prophet recognizing in this department the preciousness; notice, it is a precious cornerstone, precious corner righteousness. If I had to be square with the law, if I had to be square with what Adam was before the fall; in a word, if I had to be square with any other legal rule, it would be all over with me. But if I am to be tried by precious faith, take notice of the words of that 28th of Isaiah; "He that believes." Ah, my soul becomes square with Christ's righteousness, with his death, with his perfection; I can say to him,

"And still my soul would cleave to you,
Though prostrate in the dust."

Here, then, is a stone, a stone of infinite and eternal strength, because it is a stone of righteousness. This is, indeed, a stone of help, a tried stone, a tried righteousness. When Adam's righteousness was tested, Adam gave way, and away went his righteousness; when the righteousness of the Jewish nation was tested, they gave way, and away went their righteousness, and they are an unrighteous nation, in that sense, unto this day. But when Christ is tried, or his righteousness tried, that shall never give way. All the Old Testament saints tried it and found peace with God by it; all the Old Testament saints tried it and rejoiced that in the Lord they had righteousness and strength; all the Old Testament saints tried it, and rejoiced that in the Lord, should all the seed of Israel be justified, and should glory. David tried it when he said, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of your righteousness, even of yours only." A precious corner righteousness, then; that with which the people must be at right angles, must be square, must accord with it. Now I have got into that state myself, and have been for years, that any gospel that deviates in the least, I reckon my mind rather mathematically formed in this matter, the least deviation from Christ's perfection, the least obscurity, the least perversion, or the least suggestion of there being something deficient, or something wanting, or something that ought not to be, the least deviation I feel in a moment, it jars with my feelings directly. But let me have Jesus as having made everything square, and my soul is right with holiness, right with justice, right with love, right with mercy, right with law, and right with gospel, right for life and right for death, right for time and right for eternity, right for earth and right for heaven, and never shall be wrong again, never. There are plenty of respects in which we are wrong without being wrong there; plenty of respects in which we are out of square without being out of square there; there are plenty of respects in which foundations give way; our dearest fleshly hopes and creature expectations are often blasted, without our hope giving way, without our expectation being blasted there. Oh, then, let the inhabitants of this rock sing, let them shout from the tops of the mountains. shall have to bring that in presently, if I can, does not the apostle put together justification and glorification? "Whom he justified them he also glorified." It is a sure foundation; there is no uncertainty about it. His blood is sure to demonstrate, in the eternal salvation of his people, its efficacy, its worth, its power. In all ages the saints have found the certainty of matters here. Here all the promises of God in him are yea and amen. Old covenant

promises conditional failed; but here the promise is yea and amen. This foundation, then, is indeed an everlasting foundation, a sure foundation. And our text shows this very clearly. Our text, it is true, stands a good distance from the foundation, but its language certainly results from it, for "he shall bring forth the head-stone thereof," and he could not do that if the foundation had not stood good, you know, certainly not. And there is the same theme at the top that there is at the bottom of the building, that God so loved the world as to lay this foundation for a sinner's hope; it was a matter of grace to lay the foundation, it is a matter of grace to carry on the superstructure, it is a matter of grace to complete the same, a matter of grace to consecrate the same. "He shall bring forth the head-stone thereof with shouting's, crying, Grace, grace unto it." A foundation, a sure foundation. Perhaps I ought not to say any more here if I have made myself understood. I felt very anxious you should understand this matter, to show that wherever Jesus Christ is called the foundation, whether figuratively he is spoken of as a stone, or under any other figure, it always embodies the idea of his substitutional work; that is, the foundation that God has laid in Zion, righteousness; based, upon righteousness. You can need no mercy that you shall not have righteously; you can need no pardon, you can need no help, you can need no manifestation of God's favor, you can need no friendship, you can need no grace, you cannot need anything that you shall not have righteously, all shall come righteously. Hence that sweet scripture, which we never seem weary of referring to, that "God is just, and yet the justifier of him that believes." I will just breathe out the prayer of the disciples here, and then go to the next part, "Lord, increase our faith!"

Now we come to *the superstructure*. "If any man build upon this foundation, let him take heed how he builds thereon." If men are careful to look not only to the foundation of things temporal, but to the way in which things are constructed, the way in which things are ordered, the way in which things are managed, in order to be somewhat safe, oh, how much more may we listen to the holy, and at the same time kind and affectionate, shall I say, exhortation of the apostle: "If any man build upon this foundation, let him take heed how he builds thereon." And why? Because many people make great mistakes, a great many make fatal mistakes, as to the manner of building upon this foundation. However, there is hope for those that make a mistake, and the apostle gives us to understand this, and that such, in the Lord's own time, shall find out their errors. Hence, he says that "Every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it" there shall be a day of tribulation that shall declare whether you are rightly built thereon or not, "for it shall be revealed by fire, and every man's work shall be tried by fire." I will come to this presently and make it as plain as I hope and trust I have made the other part. Now, "If any man build thereon gold, silver, precious stones, hay, wood, stubble, see here the variety of materials. I would take the builder here, in the first place, to mean the minister of God; and if he build gold, silver, precious stones, here I would take gold, silver, and precious stones to mean real Christians. Hence, says Job, "I shall come forth as gold" and the Lord has said he will purify them as silver is purified. And they are also compared to precious stones. Now, precious stones are formed out of very rough materials. In the chemical laboratory of Nature, under the surface of the earth, there are chemical operations always going on, that out of very worthless materials are formed the diamond and all the precious stones that the earth produces. And so we by nature are worthless materials; but regeneration is a refinement, a transition from the worthless into the valuable state; and therefore, when brought into a regenerated state and united to Christ, reconciled to God, then that man that was originally nothing but a sinner, a worthless material, a vessel of wrath, fit not for heaven but for hell, has undergone a transition; he was an enemy, now he is a friend; he was an unbeliever,

now he is a believer; he was prayerless, now he is prayerful; he sought not the Lord, now he does seek the Lord. These, therefore, are compared to precious stones, that are valuable, precious to God the Father, precious to Christ, precious to the Holy Spirit, and when in their right minds they are precious one to the other; there is the love of the brethren, and Jesus Christ is precious unto them. Now, the minister who thus builds gold, or real Christians; silver, purified ones; and precious stones that have undergone this transition, the minister that builds these, he goes well on with his building. But if he build up wood, a wooden-headed professor; and hay, a mere chaffy professor; and stubble, a mere empty professor, for that is what these represent, worthless professors, that minister will suffer loss. Hence, we see now, and I know two or three churches now, I will let this go forth in print, I know two or three churches now, where a few years ago they began, for the sake of swelling the number of their members, to receive members in very fast, and to receive almost every one that would join. The result is, there is a dispute in those churches, What minister are we to have? And I can see the wood, and hay, and stubble clear enough, and I can see there is a tendency to give up the pure, the solemn truths they have hitherto held, and go over to the fashionable side of the question. Now then, if a minister, a stated minister, if he thus receive and build up these professors, by-and-by comes the fiery trial. These persons thought he was a very nice man. Ah, such a nice man our minister is! he has got no fault, never in a passion, never out of temper; never thinks wrong, never says wrong, such a nice man! And that's all it is, as for the truths he advances, they are but mere hearsay things to them. By-and-by the fiery trial comes, and they will point to some infirmity, some fault in the man, and away go these professors; and thus, his work is tried by fire, and the hay, wood, straw, and stubble are burnt out, and the poor man's building not so high by twenty feet as he thought it was. I myself, in a thousand things, as our deacons well know, am generally about twenty minutes too fast, some clocks do go rather fast, but still, at the same time, in these matters I trust I am not too fast; I trust in these matters the Lord has given me that solemnity of feeling and cautiousness that I would rather keep a child of God out for seven years than let one hypocrite in, and so deceive the souls of men. Therefore, if a minister build up people testimonially, let him be careful how he does it, and not put them off with the notion that they are Christians when they are not; for if he does, the fiery trial must come, down must go his building, and he himself most likely will be pretty much scorched; as says the apostle, "He shall be saved, but so as by fire." He shall be saved; the man himself shall not be a lost man, but his work shall burn his clothes, and perhaps his hands too, and perhaps his face too. That is the sense in which I take those words, "And if any man's work abide, he shall receive a reward." That reward that the minister receives is this, when the Master shall say to him at the last, "Well done, you good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter you into the joy of your Lord."

But let us come to personal work, that while the builder there may denote the minister in the respects I have named, it may also denote each Christian. Apply it in another way, and then, if each Christian is a builder, and I am perfectly in order in this, for the apostle says, "You, beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith." then the gold, silver, and precious stones will mean the doctrines or truths of the gospel. And if you build upon this perfect righteousness, this perfect foundation, free-will, that is, wood, or hay, or stubble; and if you are a child of God, the fire of tribulation or the fire of God's truth will burn all that up, and away will go your free-will. And if, in connection with the truth, you build up duty-faith, or any other false doctrines, by-and-by comes the fiery trial. I am speaking from experience. I was once a free-willier in my little way, but the convictions of my mind, and the illuminating power of God's truth, burnt up my free-will,

and away it went. And then I set up as a duty-faith trader in my little way; and convictions went on, illumination went on, till away went my duty-faith also. Well, I thought, my free-will and duty-faith are gone; but still, I thought, the comforts of the Holy Ghost are conditional. I can't expect the Holy Spirit to be a spirit of prayer and supplication in me unless I pray first. I can't expect the Holy Spirit ever to reveal the word with power except I prepare myself for it. Well, say you, what did you do then? Nothing; and yet I did do something, too. I gave it up, and I became a firm believer in the omnipotence, eternity, sovereignty, majesty, certainty of the Eternal Spirit of God that he takes up the isles as a very little thing, and that his mercies, and revelations, and testimonies, are no more conditional than is the Father's love, or the Savior's work. And thus, my hay, wood, and stubble were burnt up, and I had nothing left but free-grace doctrines, denoted by gold, silver, and precious stones, with which to build upon this foundation. And if we build with those materials, we are sure to be building rightly. These are the materials by which we are to be united to God, and by which we are to be built up in our most holy faith. But let us go to the Old Testament and have a word or two there of a figurative kind. Now this structure, then, must be made up of persons that shall be tried. God will sweep away all the refuges of lies and make them feel that they can be built upon this foundation only after a free grace order; it is the order after which they are to be built, after a free grace order, in contrast to the traditions of men. Now there are many scriptures in the Old Testament that have very often delighted me much upon this matter, of a figurative kind. Now, in the 6th chapter of Ezra, in the decree of Cyrus relative to the structure of the temple of the Lord, there is a very significant verse upon this subject. There were to be three rows of great stones, and one row of new timber, and the expense was to be given out of the king's house. Well, here is a great stone, that is, a great sinner. I am one; and that great sinner shall become a great saint; he shall become a child of God, a stone in mercy's building; and his saintship shall be greater than his sinner-ship; his dignity shall be greater than his preceding indignity; and the righteousness in which he shall be arrayed shall be infinitely more glorious to exalt him than sin was powerful to degrade him. A great stone. So, then, if I take them in both ways, as to sinner-ship and saintship, there is a greatness on both sides. What the three rows mean there, I was in a little puzzle about; but I tried even to get at that if I could. Of course, I don't expect all other people to see exactly as I do in these matters; but my mind may perhaps sometimes get a little pleasure in these matters, where others would not care to. Well, the three rows of stones, I thought, might be Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There is Abraham, called by grace, he is remarkable for discriminating grace. Isaac was remarkable for being the child of promise. Jacob is remarkable for being loved sovereignly; yet there is complete harmony. Abraham comes to Isaac, and says, I am saved by grace. Well, says Isaac, I am saved by a gracious promise. And Abraham and Isaac come to Jacob: Well, here am I, saved by grace; And here am I, saved by a gracious promise; And I, says Jacob, am saved by sovereign love; that God loved me, while he hated my brother Esau. And so, they all come together; and, says the Savior, they all three sit down together in the kingdom of heaven. And so, I thought, then, of the new-born babes, and the young men, and the fathers, and of that scripture in Isaiah, that "they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord and surname himself by the name of Israel." So that, I thought, this really looks like that different order of things we find, among the people of God. And then there was to be one row of new timber, not old timber. You can't work up the old Adam stuff; you may try to do it, for cheapness, perhaps; but it will never do. And you may try to work up the old covenant stuff; but it must be new timber. All the materials of Sinai are very hard and very rugged. There must be no old timber; no, it must be new. And what in the world is this one row of

new timber? Can you find that out? say you. Well, I am really now exporting what I generally use for home consumption. I dwell upon these figurative things alone, sometimes, with great delight. Well, I thought of this one row of new timber, and the words came to my mind directly, "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." I thought, here is the one row of new timber; here is the new covenant, all new. No old Adam stuff here; no old covenant stuff here; no old nature stuff here; no creature doings here. No; One row of new timber, the whole of it new together. Ah, then, great sinners as we are, if we are brought into conformity to this foundation, I had almost said into conformity to this row of new timber, we are new creatures. It is a building of new timber and living stones, a new and living way. There never was such a building before, and never will be again; as says David, "The palace is not for man, but for God;" and it is to be exceedingly magnificent, fitly framed together, growing into an holy temple in the Lord, for an habitation of God through the Spirit. And the expense was to be taken out of the king's house. I like that amazingly well. Yes, God is at the expense of it all. He has laid the foundation; he finds the materials and pays for the workmanship. He is at the expense of it all. It is free grace; a free grace building; its expense is given out of the king's house. The price could be found nowhere else but in the king's house. I am speaking now mystically and spiritually. And what was the expense? What was the cost? Christ Jesus. He must redeem the materials; they are all, I was going to say, mortgaged; they are all under sin and under the curse; and there needs a price that can redeem the materials, lay a foundation, and secure that that shall complete the building; and the cost could be found nowhere but in the king's house, in heaven, and that was Christ Jesus. God gave his only begotten Son, and that is the price. The expense was given out of the king's house.

I shall be able to say nothing this morning about the completion or consecration, nor will I preach upon this text again until next Sunday week morning. We will just have a word or two more, and then close, Now, of this structure, then, it is said in the Book of Kings, in relation to the temple, the king commanded them, it is true those stones were to be in the foundation department; never mind that, it all conveys the same idea, to bring "great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones." How descriptive is this of the Christian! Here is a great sinner. Oh, what a costly price it is that bought that man! "You are bought with a price." Wonder, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth, that God should so set his heart upon man, that rather than let us lie under the curse, he redeemed us with a price so costly.