

GOOD WORKS

A SERMON

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“So the workmen wrought.” 2 Chronicles 24:13

AFTER the Lord had built the temple completely, and filled it with his glory, this temple became from time to time partially neglected, and fell into dilapidation. Then, when a king arose or men that knew the truth, the house was again repaired. But still it fell again into dilapidation, and so it continued until at last it was consumed by fire. So, it was also with the second temple, just the same, until at last it was consumed by fire. Here is a partial, and, I think, a very solemn analogy between the temple and ourselves. For the church of God is the temple of God, and each individual believer is the temple of God, the temple of the Holy Ghost. But what a tendency is there in man! Let the Lord reveal himself, and fill the soul with his glory, as was the case with some of you when you were first brought to know him, and you seemed complete in your conformity, as it were, to the Savior, filled with all the fulness of God; but after this, alas! the inroads of sin, the inroads of the world, the inroads of fears, and many other things, what dilapidated states we have been brought into many times since that! We have been so broken down, we have been so carnalised, we have been so torn to pieces, that we seem to bear but very little resemblance to what we were when first we saw the Lord; we seem to bear but very little likeness to that time when the dew rested all night upon our branch, and when in his light we walked through darkness; when the earth and earthly things were light and little, and heavenly things were great and weighty; when time was a passing shadow, and the substantial reality of the blessings of the everlasting covenant was seen and felt; when we could rise with wings as eagles, and range in the wide circle of eternal truth as though we should never again descend. But, alas! Alas! what have we undergone since that! And but for the blood of Jesus Christ, but for the righteousness of Jesus Christ, but for the better covenant, and but for the faithfulness of the Holy Spirit to repair our souls, to renew us, to strengthen us, to raise us up from time to time, and to close up from time to time the fresh breaches that are made between us and God, and to raise us up from the ruined state in which our souls as to their feelings often get, and build us as in the days of old, and renew our youth, but for this better covenant, but for this eternal mercy, but for this yea and amen state of things, the analogy of the temple would ultimately hold good. The end of the temple was that it was burned, and on thanks to us if at the end of our journey we are not cast into the fire of hell; no thanks to us if our end is not to be subjected to everlasting burning. But before this the analogy stops, because here,

in this better covenant, there was a wonderful sacrifice by which that mighty fire is quenched. Therefore, notwithstanding the fact that we are no better in and of ourselves spiritually than they were nationally, yet we have a better covenant and a better standing, and are consequently greater debtors, for where much is given much is required. Every Christian knows that from time to time he falls into this dilapidated state, so that the service of God not only becomes insipid, but almost objectionable. Bless the Lord, as we have said, the end shall not be the same; for though he thus try his people, yet he will turn again, he will build us up again, he will refresh us again, and put us right. And we are in connection with our text also reminded of a very solemn circumstance, which occurs very frequently, and I am afraid some such circumstances exist now. Before I enter upon the subject, I will just name that circumstance; I think it is very solemnly admonitory. And it is this: Joash, king of Judah, under the guidance and influence of Jehoiada, the high priest, conformed to the Lord's ways, and helped to repair the house of the Lord, and walked in the ways of the Lord. And I suppose people thought that his heart was really in what he practiced, that his heart was really with this order of things; this order of things having a typical meaning, pointing to things that are eternal. He walked many years in this way, and everything seemed right. But, would you believe it, that all this time he had no real love to God's truth; all this time he had no real love in his heart to God's ways; for as soon as Jehoiada died, and the idolatrous princes, who, of course, were the most popular, came to him and consulted with him, away went his religion, and he joined with them in their idolatry. Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, protested against this apostasy, against this idolatry; and what did Joash do? He slew Zechariah. Though he had been befriended forty years by Jehoiada, yet he now turns around, demon-like, and slays the son of that Jehoiada who had been a father and a friend to him. Such was the end of his religion. Ah, then, see that you are not religious because your friend is, that you do not follow a certain creed because a certain friend of yours follows it; that you do not go to a certain place to hear the word because a certain friend of yours does. Oh, look to it that your religion is your own, that you know it in your own soul; that you have, independently of others altogether, a personal conviction of your state, and that you have a religion with you in your bedchamber, that you have a religion with you in your house, that you have a religion with you in your business, that you have a religion with you in the streets, that you have a religion with you in your soul, and that that religion solemnly engages your soul sometimes in private before God.

Look to this; for if your religion be not real, some circumstance will occur that will make bare your hypocrisy, that lies hidden under a fair and a flourishing profession. So, it was with Joash. But shall he go unrequited? Shall he escape the double deed of apostasy and slaying Zechariah? No; the men of Joash's own house arise and slay him. What are we to learn from this? That there is no safety but in the Lord; with him there is safety. What an infinite mercy, then, to feel that our hearts are right with God; to feel that our religion is our own; to feel that we have it direct from God, that it leads us direct to God, that it keeps us decided for God, and that every time our souls are out of order it stirs up our jealousy, godly jealousy, over ourselves! it stirs us up to prayer; it stirs us up to examine ourselves whether we be in the faith. For let us be in what advantageous positions we may, they must come to nothing if we are not in the faith; but if in the faith, then we are where we are eternally safe.

Having made these few remarks upon these two points, I will now notice our text as it lies before us.

First, then, we notice the testimony here given, that “the workmen wrought;” that is, that the workmen worked. Now I shall try in this first part to show the kind of work the Christian has to do. And I may, before I enter upon that, notice first the end which they had in view in thus repairing the temple. The end they had in view was, first, that the Lord might be with them. They had had pretty good proof of the miseries that must come upon them without the Lord, and their object was therefore that the Lord might dwell with them, and that they might dwell thus with the Lord; and the consequence would be that the temple would be in peace, as your soul will be in peace, the Lord dwelling with you, and that the city would be strong and safe, the Lord being there, “The name of that city shall be Jehovah-shammah, The Lord is there;” and that their land should be very productive, and that they should eat in plenty, and praise the name of the Lord their God, that had dealt wondrously with them. These and many more important things could be attained by them only by the Lord’s own order of things. Then you have nothing to do but take all this spiritually; that our object is, as the apostle said, “We labor, that whether present,” in body, “or absent, we may be accepted of him.” For if he received us into his love, can we be received into a better place? If he received us into his choice, can we be received into anything better? If we are received into the perfection of his dear Son, can we be received into anything more magnificent? If we are received into his kingdom, can we be received into anything more stable? If we are received at last into glory, can we be received into anything so blessed and wondrous as that eternal glorification that awaits all that shall thus be taken away from all false refuges, and led to look to the Lord alone? See, then, the greatness of the end; and then see the greatness of the end antitypically. Why, all the achievements of this world are but so many straws, but so many nothings, in comparison of the achievements of an incarnate God, by which all the people of God shall succeed. Now, as the work I speak of is that of building, we will leave the idea now of repairing out, and come to the circumstance of building. The Lord’s people are spoken of as being built unto the Lord; yes, they are spoken of as building up themselves. But in order for us to build up ourselves, as Jude beautifully describes, “Build up yourselves,” that is, the Lord enabling you to do so, “on your most holy faith;” most holy faith, because that faith brings us the highest consecration that any creatures ever knew. Even the holiness of angels does not equal the uncreated holiness of the saint; Christ is his holiness. It is a dignified standing, for all dignity is included in the idea of holiness. “Building up yourselves on your most holy faith.” There is a standing of dignity which the saints have above angels. They are servants; the people of God are sons, “Praying in the Holy Ghost.” To pray in the Spirit of God, that is to pray in the Holy Ghost. If you pray as the Pharisee did, that is not praying in the Holy Ghost; but to pray as the publican did is to pray in the Spirit of God, in the spirit of the gospel. To pray as formalists do is not to pray in the spirit of the gospel. It means the spirit of the gospel, the vitality of prayer. “Keep your-selves in the love of God;” as the Savior says, “Continue you in my love.” And then as though Jude should say, You are poor creatures, you will need mercy every day you live, “Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” I think this is quite enough, then, to authorize us to go on to speak of Christians as spiritual builders. Now I will take a careful view of this. In order to become a spiritual builder, you yourself must undergo personally a certain process; and if we are strangers to that process, we are altogether disqualified to be spiritual builders. The process stands thus. The Lord appointed Jeremiah over the nations, “to root out;” that is one thing you must undergo in order to be saved. We are by nature rooted in the world; we are planted there, and in sin, and in the law, and in death, and there we are content. But when conviction enters into the soul, and makes you feel the emptiness of the world, that is one step towards rooting you out. When conviction of sin enters the soul, why, you say, sin, I never saw it before, is the root of my present existence. Creative power was originally the root of my

existence, but sin now lies in the very root of my existence. Oh, how bitter the gall that this must yield to my soul to eternity, if I am found in that condition when death shall come! It will root you up, and make you long for a transplantation from such fearful ground to ground which is holy. And you will find that ground nowhere but in Christ. "Planted together in the likeness of Christ Jesus." "To root up, and to pull down." Pull down what? Why, your towering thoughts concerning yourself. Every man is as sure as he is of his own existence to do two things, to think too highly of himself, and too meanly of Jesus Christ. "Peter, whom do men say that I am?" "Well, some say Elias, some Jeremiah, some one of the prophets." All too mean, you see, all too low. And just so we are by nature; we all think too highly of ourselves, and too meanly of Jesus Christ. Oh, how highly did Saul of Tarsus think of himself! But when the Lord pulled him down, oh, how different, how different! Now I feel and see I am a sinner, and nothing but a sinner; a blasphemer, and nothing but a blasphemer; a wretch undone, and nothing but a wretch. Guilt binds me like mighty fetters; I am in a prison where the gates are brass, and the bars are iron. Ah, what a poor creature I am! Where does all this come from? From the very center of my existence; it comes from my heart. Is it possible that in my heart are all manner of evils? Here, then, the Lord pulls you down; now you are very low in your own eyes, very mean in your own sight. Booted out, pulled down, and destroyed; that is, your false hope destroyed. "Sin revived, and I died." You feel now you have not a particle of hope in God arising from yourself; any hope you may now have must arise from his mercy towards you in Christ Jesus. And not only to destroy, but to throw down. It is remarkable that that should be placed last in the description of the work of grace there. To throw down what? Why, that self-righteousness that you will try to set up. I look back at the time I bought prayer-book after prayer-book, and I was determined to climb up by a path of my own devising. But the Lord, by keeping up a sight and sense of what I was, threw the whole of it down. Just so he will do with you; and when he has brought you to nothing, when he has thus rooted you up, pulled you down, destroyed your false refuges, for he will sweep away the refuge of lies, and thrown down all your false hopes, now comes the planting, or rather the building. Now if that be your case, I know what you will see, that there is not anything under the heaven so much concerns you as a foundation upon which to hope that God will be merciful to you; as a foundation upon which to hope that God will be on your side; as a foundation upon which to hope that God, against whom you have thus stood as a self-destroying sinner, will be your Friend. Well, the Lord steps in and says, "Behold," you poor, forlorn, helpless, cast down, destroyed, self-loathing sinner, "behold, I lay in Zion" don't you attempt to do anything in that way, that is not for you to do; I will prepare a foundation for you, and tell you how to find it, "behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone," and that is Christ Jesus in the perfection of his mediatorial work; "a tried stone;" and he was tried. I shall have to bring three fires to you presently by which you are to be tried, and see whether you can stand them all three or not; if you cannot you are good for nothing, and you will be lost. Now Jesus Christ was tried in every way. There is no Christian's heart has not at times bounded at the thought that the dear Savior in all the trials he underwent always came off unscathed, he always came off victorious, he always came off to his own honor, to the glory of God, and to our eternal advantage. Oh, how will our souls adore him when we behold him face to face! And when that light that is above the brightness of an Oriental noonday sun shall shine upon all that he has done, and shine upon all the way in which the Lord has led us, and shine upon the deep counsels of heaven, I do not wonder when that scene is realized that the voices should be as the sound of many waters and of mighty thundering. And if it be true of the little children on earth whose hearts were touched, why, what shall we say to those in heaven? "If these should hold their peace, the very stones would cry out." "A precious corner-stone, a sure foundation; he that believes" do you

believe, then, that he is strong enough to bear the weight of your soul, to bear the weight of your responsibility, to bear the weight of their expectation? We may expect things of a friend, and that friend may say, Well, I am not strong enough to meet that expectation; I am not strong enough to meet that trust; I can only go so far; I can do nothing beyond. But the Savior's power is unlimited; he is able to save to the uttermost. "He that believes shall not make haste;" which the apostle Peter explains to mean confusion, "He that believes shall not be confounded." What is there to confound them? The sin that naturally confounds us is gone; the law that naturally confounds us is gone, when we are brought to this foundation. Satan also naturally confounds us; but when we are brought to this foundation he is trodden under our feet; perplexities and adversities all vanish before the Lord when we are thus brought to rest upon this foundation. Now the apostle says, "Let every man take heed how he builds there on;" not only because there is no other foundation, not only because there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved; but because, while we may be upon the right foundation, we may build with the wrong material; and though we are upon the right foundation, if we are wrongly built we shall not stand the fires I have presently to notice, and the consequence will be there will be no avail, we shall be as surely lost as though we had made no profession at all, even though we may be upon the right foundation, if we are not rightly built. "If any man build", and may the Holy Spirit give us here two things; first, to see the meaning, and second, to feel the importance, of what the apostle there says, "if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble." Now here is a strange compound. What is the gold? The gold denotes the faith of the believer, or the believer in his faith; that I shall show presently. The silver denotes consecration to God; and the precious stone denotes the preciousness of the soul, the preciousness of the man. The Lord's people are his jewels; they are his special and peculiar treasure. Now, then, if you build as gold, for Job said, "When he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold," you will build simply by faith, that it might be by grace. It will be by the grace of God, the pure golden grace of God, that you will build. You will mix nothing of the creature with it; it will be by the pure golden free-grace truths of the gospel that you will build; it will be by the everlasting covenant that you will build. Now if you build in this way, then you are of right material, then you are gold, and you will stand the trial. Now that is building a right. I would rather not occupy your time in pointing out what the hay, wood, and stubble are; but I will give you an instance or two, as a matter of faithfulness, to clear my conscience. I have been christened, confirmed by the bishop, I have been brought up in the church; I believe in Jesus Christ, and I hope I shall be saved. There is your hay, there is your wood, there is your stubble; that is delusion. Well, I believe it is the duty of all to believe savingly, and I have done my duty, do my duty, and shall do my duty. Oh, and so you build your duty-faith, bring your duty in; so, you are not indebted, then, as the Ephesians were, as Saul of Tarsus was, and as all good people are, to the sovereign pleasure of God in giving you faith; then you are not brought to feel that it is by grace, and that through faith; that not of yourselves, but it is the gift of God. You are not brought to feel that the workmanship is his, and not yours: "it is he that has made us, not we ourselves." Now anything short, then, of building by pure faith is delusion. If you are fitted for the building you will answer to that scripture, "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise." Now here I have an everlasting foundation, here I have a covenant God, and upon this foundation my faith rests. Formed for him, I am fit for no other religion. Why, Catholicism, if I may personify it for a moment, would not have me; it would say, "Away with such a fellow." It is not fit for me, and I am not fit for it. Duty-faith and free-will are not fit for me, and I am not fit for them, I am spoiled for them. But bring me here, to Zion, to this sure foundation, to these pure truths, to this covenant God, I am just fitted for them, because:

“The poorer the wretch, the more welcome there.”

So, I am just fit for them, and they for me, bless the Lord for it. We have to praise the Lord for his gracious fitness of things, all things lying at right angles with the precious corner-stone. That is the gold. David in the 19th Psalm, after enumerating the operations of gospel truths, what they do in converting the soul, making wise the simple, rejoicing the heart, enlightening the eyes, says, “More to be desired are they than gold” can we say this is our feeling? “yes, then much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.” So that if we are building aright, this is what the truths of the gospel will be to us, more precious than gold. Then the silver means consecration to God. Now if we are rightly built upon Christ, our delight will be in him. The ivy, as an old divine somewhere says, clings to the oak to support itself; but its root is somewhere else; it draws its nourishment from somewhere else. So, if we make a wrong profession of Jesus Christ, our delights are somewhere else, our pleasures are somewhere else, and like Joash it would not take much, if circumstances so led, to make us leave him altogether. If this be the case, then we are false silver, and not real; our hearts and souls not being thus vitally and truly with the Lord. Then precious stones is another character of the Christian, and I will tell you how you may judge whether you are one of these jewels, whether you are one of these precious stones that are on the breastplate of the high priest, and on his shoulder-pieces, and that form the foundations of the walls of the city. Now if you are manifestly precious to Christ, I know the converse will be this; you will see a great beauty in this scripture, namely, that “a gift” Jesus Christ is a gift, “is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that has it.” So, if you possess him, he will be to you the pearl of great price, bringing you to all that God can give. And now this precious stone, this gift, Christ Jesus, is “as a precious stone in the eyes of him that has it, and whithersoever it turns it prospers.” Now I do not wish to speak offensively, but I will tell you this, that if Jesus Christ be precious to you, if you are brought to see and feel your need of him, your own personal experience is quite enough to demonstrate the truth of that scripture, that “whithersoever it turns it prospers;” and you will say, Well, if he can thus prosper with me, such a wretch as I am, he can prosper with any one; if he can save me, he can save any one; if he can pluck me from hell, he can pluck any one from hell. And this experience will make you hope for another, “if he has saved a wretch like me.” But do not go singing that if you do not mean it; do not say “a wretch like me” if you are congratulating yourself all the time, hugging up your self-righteous rags all the time; do not sing that. The Lord is satisfied with nothing short of the heart; he abhors the sacrifice where not the heart is found. If therefore Christ be thus precious to you, that is an evidence that you are precious to him; you are building upon the foundation by pure faith, by consecration to God, and by the preciousness of Jesus Christ. Now can you understand this? The wood, hay, and stubble then will mean your false notions, false confidences, and false hopes.

And now there are three fires for you to stand. I will mention the lower one first, see whether you can stand that; it is a very hot one, I can tell you, but the word of the Lord will bring a remedy for it. James gives us this lower fire. “The tongue,” he says, “is a fire, a world of iniquity, and sets on fire the course of nature, and it is set on fire of hell.” This fire of hell burned against the Savior. How was he publicly reproached, scandalized, and maligned! But did it move him? No; he said, “Wisdom is justified of her children.” You may turn my liberality into licentiousness if you please; you may charge me, because I am good, with being evil; you may charge me, because I am liberal, with patronizing publicans and harlots; but my people know better; “wisdom is justified of her

children.” So, you must stand this fire. You will have the truths that you hold spoken against; you will have the minister that you hear spoken against; you will have the place you go to spoken against; you will be reviled and reproached. Can you stand this? If you cannot stand this fire, then it shows you are not sincere in your profession. You must not be moved by it. Well, say you, it is very hard to bear sometimes; what shall I do? Take these two scriptures, if God enable you to do so. The one is, “You shall be hidden from the scourge of the tongue,” as you stand in Christ; and the other is, “No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against you, in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, says the Lord.” Thus, then, you must stand this fire of hell. All sorts of things will be said; never mind; go right on, do not stop. Why, if you take notice of everything that people say of you, you will have enough to do. The best way, is to go right on with God’s truth, and leave the matter with him. That is one fire. Now there are some that cannot very well stand that fire; no, they love the approbation of men, they love the praise of men more than the praise of God. But you must stand it. Well, I am afraid I shall not get on so well, because I shall not be so respectable if I belong to that sect everywhere spoken against. You leave that with the Lord, and you will not only do as well, you will do better. And some that reproach you now, when they find out that you are firm to your principles, the Lord will make some of those that speak against you now come some day and lick the dust of your feet, he will. I have seen, much of it in my day, You who are lovers of the truth, God help you to trust to him, cleave to him, and he will protect you, he will uphold you; he will supply you, he will make a way for you. There is not anything too hard for the Lord. If, therefore, you be reproached for his sake, happy are you; for the Spirit of God and of “glory rests upon you; great is your reward in heaven. The second fire is a stronger fire still, and that is the fire of God’s eternal law. Say you, I cannot stand that. You must have something by which you can stand the fire of God’s law. Well, say you, nothing can stand that but the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That is just it. Go in the name of the Lord, and make mention of his righteousness only, and that righteousness is fireproof to God’s eternal law. Why, say you, I can meet the fiery law only by the atonement of Christ. That is just it.

“Sprinkled o’er the burning throne
His all-atoning blood.”

Oh, if you have that righteousness and that atonement that can stand the fire of the law, has stood it, does stand it, and will stand it, then you are rightly built; you are built by pure faith, you are built by consecration, you are built by the preciousness of Christ, you are willing to endure reproach, and you have a righteousness that has endured and always will endure to meet the fiery law of God.

Then the third fire is the fire of general tribulation. Satan will often try to persuade you that your troubles arise from this, and that, and the other, connected with your religion. I could say many things here, but I feel a little, I was going to say timid, lest I should be misunderstood; but I must venture one or two things. You meant to have perfect order in your house, and you meant to have what they call family prayer morning and night, things in order. By-and-bye one thing interferes, and another thing interferes; and if there is a little one, when you are engaged in prayer early in the morning, it is sure to cry; and if you stop half an hour longer it will burst out again. It is wonderful in what a variety of ways the Lord permits our formalities to be upset and overcome. I am speaking now from experience, for many years ago I recollect it well. I have gone out of my

house in the morning, and I have thought, Well, I cannot expect the Lord to be with me today; something will happen to me; I quite expect it, for I have not prayed as I ought to have done. And I think those have been the sweetest days I have had. That used to puzzle me rather; I could hardly make it out. What a strange thing it is! Why, here I am, upset here, and upset there, and yet the Lord comes to me, and brings me into this sweet fellowship with himself. What a strange thing this is! But so, it is; the Lord will hinder you in many of your formalities and regularities, and what is it to do? To hide pride from man, that is what it is to do. Then, again, affliction of wife or husband, or adverse circumstances. You meant to go on smoothly, never out of temper. I am not going to advocate being out of temper, but still I have something to say about that. I do not much admire the temperament that is never out of temper. I would rather have those that storm a little sometimes, and soon over; because the others sulk so long; always cool, you do not know whether they are pleased or not. As for myself, I like demonstration; I like people to show you what they really are. And when their temper breaks out, they cannot keep it up long. So, the storm is sure to be soon over; there may be a few black clouds hanging about, but they will soon pass over. As in a land or a sea storm, be quiet.

Calm amidst tempestuous motion,
Knowing that our Lord is nigh.”

He will by-and-bye give the word, “Peace, be still;” and there shall be a great calm; and then it will not be, What manner of man am I, that the winds and waves should obey me? Why, they have tossed you about like a straw; but now it is, “What manner of man is this?” Ah, it is the God-man; it is the Son of God; it is Immanuel; it is our Savior. Here, then, the words are true that”

“You do conduct your people
Through torrents of temptation;
Nor will we fear, while you are near,
The fire of tribulation.

“But lift our hands exulting
In your almighty favor;
The love divine that made us your
Shall keep us your forever.”